

SYNERGY

Volume 3: No.4

Exploring the Boundaries of Cinema and Entertainment



**The End of the World in
Myth and Cinema
Disaster Magnet:
The Statue of Liberty
A History of Triffids
Werewolf!
The Tiger Lillies**

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SYNERGY

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Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

DVD-R

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms.

NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

Blu Ray

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>. It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

If you require an ALL region DVD and Blu-ray player, we recommend you look at the Kogan Blu-ray player (<http://www.kogan.com.au>)

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned as appropriate.

DD refers to Digital Download with the format of the download following in brackets.

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The print and digital edition of Synergy is published six times a year and includes reviews from the website from the preceding period expanded content, articles and features research, news, added images, screen shorts and competitions.

Features, articles, news and competitions only appear in the digital and print editions.

Digital Edition Special Conditions

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The End of the World...well, maybe not !

This is one of the stranger issues of Synergy which focuses on The End of the World, Disaster films and related cinema within the catastrophe genre.

At the same time as dedicated rationalists and cynical old bastards we are have also included an entertaining guide to the insanity of the whole End of the World industry from Christian loonies to new age Mayan fanatics, from religious myths to the latest release films. At present there seems to have been a rash of these titles from *2012* to *The Road*, from *The Book of Eli* to *I am Legend*, so we thought it would be fun to give them a critical view.

We have also included a solid Thinking Time special covering everything from climate change to fundamentalism.

Our major article gives a solid introduction to The End of the World in myth and cinema with considerations of major works of cinema within the genre. At the same time we do not want to

overload you with pessimistic premonitions of doom and gloom so there is lots more including a great feature on Werewolves.

As I reflect on the development of Synergy one thing I recently noted was that our most downloaded issue was the one on Sin-ema !

While cult films, horror and world cinema all received a good response, it seems you all loved our intelligent guide to erotica.

So now the truth is out, there are lots of people out there who like our approach of treating adult cinema as any other form of entertainment.

We will certainly consider following up the Sin-ema issue with another issue in the future but for now you will just have to be happy with the Erotica section each issue. We will make sure we get some choice content in each issue so as to not to let you down !

We hope you enjoy this issue.

**Editors
Synergy**

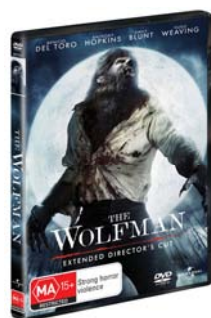
The Road

Icon Films have made available 15 copies of *The Road* for us to giveaway. For a chance to win a copy send an email with *The Road* in the subject line to promotions@synergy-magazine.com please also include your name and full address in the body of the email.



The Wolfman

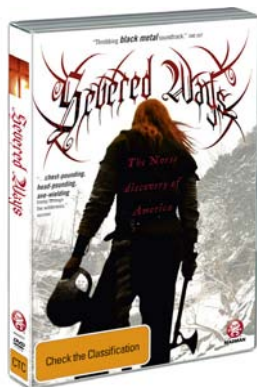
Universal have made available six copies of *The Wolfman* for us to giveaway. For a chance to win a copy send an email with *The Wolfman* in the subject line to promotions@synergy-magazine.com please also include your name and full address in the body of the email.



Please note these giveaways are only open to Australian readers.

Severed Ways The Norse Discovery of America

This story of vikings, murder, mayhem and black metal is "...one fantastically daring piece of work... a visionary work from one of the most promising new American narrative filmmakers in recent years." (Indiewire)

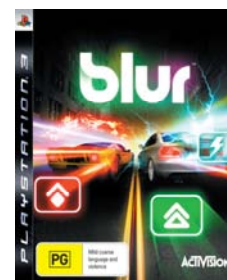


Madman have made available three copies of *Severed Ways* for us to giveaway.

For a chance to win a copy send an email with *Severed Ways* in the subject line to promotions@synergy-magazine.com please also include your name and full address in the body of the email.

Blur

Blur is the ultimate powered-up racing experience, dropping players into heart-pumping, electrified action with multiple cars trading paint as they charge towards the finish line. Drivers careen through real-world track locations packed with fast curves, sneaky alternate routes and hair-raising jumps in over 50 licensed cars as they collect intense Power-ups, including the ability to blast other cars out of the way with huge bursts of energy, boost their speed, and more. *Blur* delivers a new style of Powered-up racing experience for all gamers and is available now on Xbox 360 and Playstation 3.



Transformers: War for Cybertron

Transformers: War for Cybertron challenges players to become the ultimate weapon as a Transformers character in the final, epic war that will determine the survival of their entire race. Armed with a diverse arsenal of lethal, high-tech weaponry and the ability to instantly convert from robot to vehicle at any time, players will engage in heart-pounding battles on land and in the air in this gripping, 3rd person action shooter set in the Transformers war-ravaged homeland. Complete with several multiplayer modes, *Transformers* allows gamers to play through story missions with their friends in drop in/drop out online co-op, and also create their own character for competitive head-to-head multiplayer modes, choosing among four distinct character classes, personalising its look and selecting from a huge variety of weapons, skills and abilities.



Activision have made available three copies of *Blur* for us and one copy of *Transformers: War for Cybertron* to giveaway.

For a chance to win a copy send an email with *Blur* or *Transformers* in the subject line to promotions@synergy-magazine.com please also include your name and full address in the body of the email.

Salo classified R 18+ upon review

The R18+ (Scenes of torture and degradation, sexual violence and nudity) rating awarded to SALO has been confirmed by the Review Board.

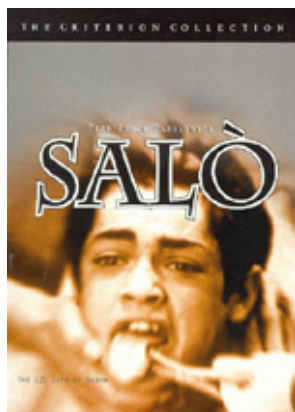
A five-member panel of the Classification Review Board (the Review Board) has in a majority decision determined that the film Salo is classified R 18+ (Restricted) with the consumer advice 'Scenes of torture and degradation, sexual violence and nudity'.

In the Review Board's majority opinion Salo warrants this classification because the inclusion of additional material on the DVD facilitates wider consideration of the context of the film which results in the impact being no more than high.

The minority were of the view that the film should be Refused Classification. The Review Board strongly advises consumers to consider whether this is a film they wish to see as it contains scenes of torture, degradation, cruelty and sexual violence that may offend some sections of the community. Films classified R 18+ are legally restricted to adults. Persons aged under 18 years cannot be admitted to films classified R 18+. Some material classified R 18+ may be offensive to sections of the adult community. Consumer advice is additional information which is intended to help consumers decide if they want to view this type of material.

The Review Board convened today in response to an application from the Minister for Home Affairs to review the decision made by the Classification Board to classify Salo R 18+ with the consumer advice 'Scenes of torture and degradation, sexual violence and nudity'.

In reviewing the classification, the Review Board worked within the framework of the National Classification Scheme, applying the provisions of the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995, the National Classification Code and the Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games. This is the same framework used by the Classification Board.



Moon Nazis Are Coming The First Footage from Iron Sky Released!

Blind Spot Pictures and Energia Productions have released the first footage from their upcoming science fiction movie Iron Sky. In the world of Iron Sky the Nazis left for the Moon in 1945 - and in 2018 they are coming back. The movie is a science fiction black comedy, a Finnish-German co-production shot mainly in English.

You can see the fresh footage on Energia's YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/Energiaproductions>) and on the Iron Sky website (<http://www.ironsky.net/>).

The footage - edited into teaser format - was filmed in Tampere, Finland in March, but the main shooting of the film will begin later this year. The soundtrack was provided by Slovenian underground music heavyweight Laibach, who will also create the soundtrack of the movie. The CGI effects were created by Energia Productions.

The budget of Iron Sky is 6.5 million euros, making it one of the most expensive Finnish film projects to date, and it will be released in 2011. Iron Sky is the second film project from the creators of Star Wreck, an internet phenomenon that has gathered over eight million viewers all around the world.





"We shot this footage mainly to make sure our workflow works as planned", says the director Timo Vuorensola.

"The visual look and feel is one of the biggest challenges we need to overcome. Shooting this footage - which we will also use in the final film when it comes out - provided us with enough material to test out several options and pin down one. I'm hoping to find a visual combination that's unique: something that looks a bit like a comic book and a bit like concept art, but with a definite photorealistic atmosphere."

The movie is directed by Timo Vuorensola and produced by Tero Kaukomaa (Blind Spot Pictures), Samuli Torssonen (Energia Productions) and Oliver Damian (27 Films Production). The main cast includes Julia Dietze (*1½ Ritter*), Götz Otto (*Schindler's List*, *The Downfall*), Tilo Prückner (*The Neverending Story*, *Die Fälscher*) and Udo Kier (*Dogville*, *Dancer in the Dark*). The screenplay is written by the acclaimed sci-fi writer Johanna Sinisalo (Nebula Award nominee 2009, Finlandia Prize 2000) and Michael Kalesniko (*Private Parts*).

The first teaser of Iron Sky was released in 2008 and it has gathered over 3.7 million views.

The creators of Iron Sky are very active in the social media and have gathered a sizable international fan following.

On a weekly basis over 60,000 people follow the movie project and collaborate with it, and the figure keeps rising daily.

Headpress Volume 2 Number 1

Available now to view free online and also as a collector edition hardback of 250 copies

Headpress is proud to announce its leap into the digital age with the launch of its infamous flagship quarterly, the Headpress journal, both online as a free ezine and also a collector edition full colour hardback, individually numbered and limited to 250 copies worldwide.



Containing the same cutting edge, provocative brain-bending content of yesteryear, Headpress is now accessible to the masses. Anyone, anytime, anywhere...

To commemorate each quarterly edition, and not being one to neglect our publishing roots, the ezine will be accompanied by a collector edition hardcopy available for purchase nowhere else but here through this website.

Each collector edition contains exclusive content not available online plus facsimile pages from the original out of print Headpress journal, starting with No 1 and running consecutively thereafter.

Contents include:

Fred West Home Improvements
The Lighter Side Of Serial Killing by David Kerekes
Only the Sky Remains Uncorrupted
A Visit to the Castle De Sade with Martin Jones
Mixtape: Analogue NOW!
by Joe Scott Wilson
Ghostmonger! The Wholly Serious History Of Fake Ghosts as Witnessed by a 1930s Comic Genius by Jennifer Wallis
Project Mogwai
Four paintings by Rik Rawling

Exclusive to the collector edition:

Unrepentant: dead pornstar Jamie Gillis interviewed by Calum Waddell
Facsimile pages from the very first edition of Headpress Vol 1 No 1 (Spring 1991)

Online ezine:

<http://www.worldheadpress.com/ezine/>

Print:

<http://www.headpress.com>

THANATOMORPHOSE IN ADVANCED STATE OF PUTREFACTION ON THE WEB

Montréal, CANADA – THANATOFILMS, a subsidiary of Les productions Outofnowhere inc., proudly announces the July 8th 2010 official website launch of director Éric Falardeau's independently produced dark tale of sex and gore *Thanatomorphose*.

Thanatomorphose is a French word meaning the visible signs of an organism's decomposition caused by death. The synopsis goes as follow: One day, the young and beautiful Laura wakes up and finds her flesh rotting...

Director Éric Falardeau describes the film: "My approach follows a famous quote from French poet Jean Cocteau:

"You've never seen death? Look in the mirror every day and you will see it like bees working in a glass hive."

The film main emphasis is not on the why, but the how: how she will react to what is happening to her?

It is a film about the body as an object, a commodity. How do we treat our body and disconnect ourselves of it in the process."

Last year, a teaser was shot to help find investors and to involve the public in the film conception. It has been screened in festivals all around the world and will welcome visitors of the new website. The July 8th launch date coincides with the start of 2010 Fantasia Film Festival. The trailer will be featured on the festival's DVD and the poster will also be lurking in the pages of the festival's program.

Thanatomorphose's trailer has been described as having *"visual that's incredibly powerful and really had my imagination working overtime."*



(...) It has me in line for tickets to the movie right now!"

Brian Morton of RogueCinema.com

Thanatomorphose's crew includes first AD Marie-Josée Lamontagne, artistic director Véronique Poirier, stop motion animator Simon Beaupré (*La cité de pierre*), make-up and special effects artists Véronique Dumas (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *A Night at the Museum*, *The Fountain*), and Josée Courtemanche.

The website will also feature an official production blog hosted by famous horror culture French website Sinistre Blogzine.

Sinistre Blogzine editor Alexandre Duguay: *"We are proud to associate ourselves to the project of talented director Éric Falardeau by hosting the film official production blog. It is a great opportunity to contribute to the ever growing presence of Quebec independent genre film here and in the world."*

Visit the website today !

<http://www.thanatomorphosefilm.com>



Actiongirls News

Get ready for the NEW Actiongirls....

Actiongirls goes 3D in July!

Web: <http://www.actiongirls.com>

All new sets will be available in 3D as well as standard 2D for Red and Blue Anylgraph glasses and soon for 3D TV's. If you don't have a pair you can get them for under \$2.00 U.S. at Amazon.com from various sellers.

Shot in 3D, these are not some cheesy 2D to 3D conversion but the real deal.

A wide range of samples are on the welcome and tour pages at [actiongirls.com](http://www.actiongirls.com).

Imagine Wendy 4, Jordan Carver and Zemanova in *3D Boobovision!*

Boobs, Butts and Guns reaching out onto your lounge and into your face like never before.

Actiongirls welcomes Double H Internet Superstar Jordan Carver to the family of Actiongirls in new exclusive videos and pictorials.

Never before has one site displayed so many internet super stars under one umbrella with Jordan Carver, Denise Milani, Wendy 4, Zemanova, Brooke Becker, Aylen Alvarez, Mya

Jane, Dana Hamm & Megan Daniels all in one site. The best of the non nude and nude babes in the world! With over two hundred new faces for 2010.

The style of the photography has taken a step up from the older 2005 site with dramatic movie lighting and comic book style settings. Many of our new sets shot on green screen and adding many elements in 3D.

The site has stepped the updates up to forty updates a month now ten a week from our older 2008 schedule of eight per month.

We also have more models than ever before, shooting in the US, UK, Czech Republic, Spain and Canada.

Our shooting schedule currently is over 250 days during 2010 with a staff of eight photographers including names like Chris Thomson, Justin Price, Alexius Vitaly, Adam Chilson, Joe Venge, Andy Hartmark, Paul Bucetta and of course Scotty JX. The equipment has been upgraded as well using High Speed Cameras, 3D Rigs and New 1080p Chip HD cameras.

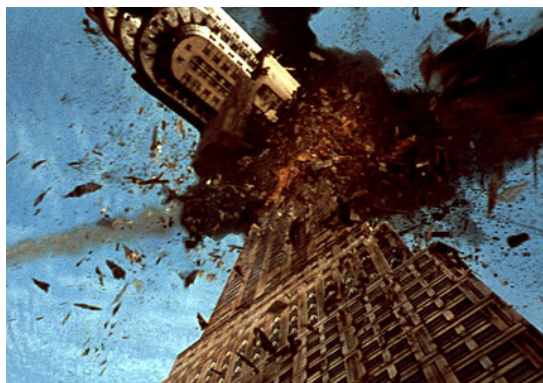
This year will feature videos in 3D, more fantasy styled CG Sets, blockbuster movie-like themed videos and pictorials, comic book styled sets and much more.

Please make a visit to the site as Scotty and the team haven't stopped working at keeping it fun and entertaining while featuring only best look-

The End of the World in Myth and Cinema



The End of the World is a myth found within all the world religions; it is as central to theology as the creation myth since it gives an explanation as to how the world has reached its current state and declares its future. To understand the significance of this statement we must appreciate that religious thinking, in general, is marked by a form of conceptualization which is focused on "moral decline". Regardless of whether the religion in question is eastern or western, new age or a new religious movement, each posits a "golden age" when man was in union with the divine (or nature, the cosmos; any range of descriptors could be used) and a process whereby this union was broken and history moved inexorably away from the creation event and towards the end of creation. This myth is used to imbue history with an artificial sense of meaning and give religious communities the moral upper hand and a false sense of authority.



Of the monotheistic religions Christianity has the most developed theology of the End of the World known as eschatology. The early disciples believed Jesus would return in their lifetimes and most historians believe that it was only due to St. Paul and his vision of an astral if not Apollo-like Christ that Christianity survived

the difficult hurdle of their lord and saviour missing his return appointment. The belief that Jesus would return increases around times of crisis. One of these key periods was at the end of the first Millennium. During the Middle Ages there were untold cults which believed in the imminent return of Jesus. An excellent overview is found in *The Pursuit of the*

Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages, Norman Cohn. Oxford University Books, 1970.

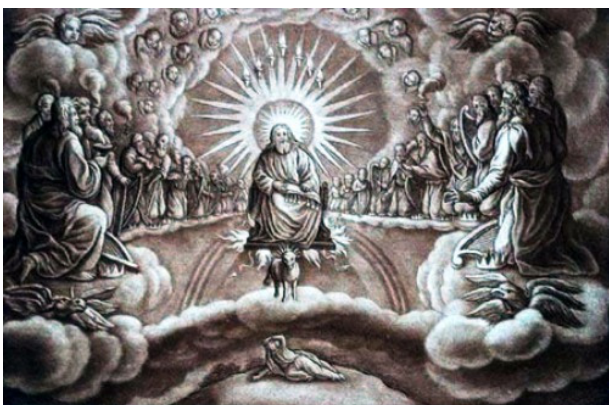
It is fair to say, however, that it is with Protestantism that eschatology really ran rampant.



Book of Daniel

Since the Protestants wanted to take the Bible literally they ignored historical interpretations and used the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of St. John to create complex End of the World Scenarios. Even though most objective Biblical historians interpret the events of the Book of Daniel in the context of Assyria and Babylon and The Book of Revelation in terms of the Roman rule of Nero, Protestants use both books as forecasters of future events. They backed their claims with their own obscure dating of Old Testament books.

This was done in such a way that it looked to the uninformed reader that the prophecies included were great visions of the future when actually they were either written at the same



Revelation of St. John



The Rapture

time as the events described or at a later date. They accordingly not only had no prophetic significance but those who used them could be accused of deliberate deception.

Protestant sects became more and more focused on eschatology leading to The Great Disappointment of 1844 when thousands of members of the Adventist sect waited on hill tops for Jesus to return. After a quick novel re-interpretation of the nature of Jesus' return, the sect continued on to become the Seventh Day Adventists but learnt their lesson and did not offer any further firm dates for their lord's return. They did, however, continue to make an industry from end of the world hype ranging from movies to correspondence courses which continues to this day.

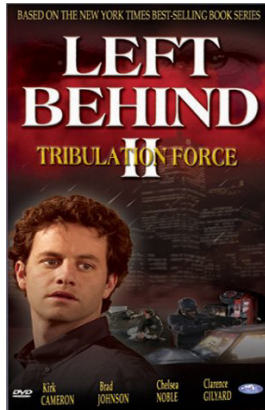
This process of dating Jesus' return continued throughout the early years of the Jehovah's Witness sect with a wide range of chosen dates and failed returns. Many sects continue this practise today including one major leader, Hal Lindsay who claimed Jesus would return in 1988 and ended with egg on his face. Most modern television preachers use the supposedly imminent return of Jesus to whip up hysteria as well as a swag of financial rewards.

One of the more quirky aspects of this belief is The Rapture. This doctrine is traced back to Edward Irving in 1825 who lead a small and obscure Christian sect named as the Catholic Apostolic Church. This belief, now current throughout the evangelical Christian world, is that



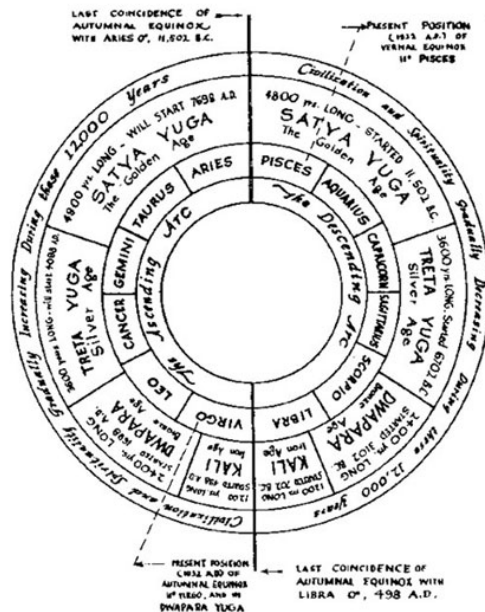
Edward Irving

all the Christians will be raptured from the earth and after seven years of tribulation, during which Satan will run riot on earth torturing and brutalizing the unsaved, Jesus will return. It has proved lucrative for both the Christian fiction and film market. The series *Left Behind* has sold millions of copies as Christians get all excited about what Satan will do to us unbelievers when they have left the planet. So much for loving your neighbour!



These strange and bizarre beliefs may seem insignificant however when we consider that some 50% of US citizens define themselves as Christians. We begin to realize their power. It is also rather startling to see how many of these beliefs underlie themes found in both modern literature and film.

In the east both Hinduism and Buddhism have cyclic views of history. Rather than a creator deity moulding the world out of clay and kick-starting a golden age, they see history as a series of long cycles. These cycles, however, still display the same characteristics as western eschatology. In Hinduism the Golden Age may have begun by a lesser being emanating the universe from itself but it still triggers a cycle of



Hindu cycles of time as filtered through the lens of the works of Madame Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy

moral decline through ages of Gold, Silver, Copper and Iron. At the end of the age of Kali or Iron, there is a cataclysm. In some sects, such as the Vaishnava who worship Vishnu, there are ten major avatars or incarnations of the divine which take place during these cycles. Kalki, the final avatar heralds the end of the world and destroys the sinful with a blazing sword and rides across the globe on a giant white horse. In Buddhism, the golden age begins with the teaching of a Buddha (and there have supposedly been innumerable Buddhas, the current Buddha dating from around 600 BCE) and as the teachings decline the world mirrors that moral decline until it reaches a time where there are no Buddhist teachings in the world and disasters unfold.

It is interesting that new age religions have also followed these themes. The present obsession with the Mayan date of 2012 and supposed coming earth transformations all extend from the influence of mainstream religious belief filtered through the syncretic new age mindset. The new age worldview developed in the Sixties and Seventies was influenced by everything from 19th occult theories such as Theosophy and Spiritualism to astrology and Christian mysticism. The new age can really be defined as a mishmash of incompatible ideologies and tends to create an End of the World scenario from a wide range of sources.



Krishna

We can distil from this discussion a range of key themes which mark “end of the world” thinking and then see how they influence modern cinema and entertainment.

The key to End of the World thinking is a mindset which includes the belief in a Golden Age. This age marks a period when religious beliefs are pure and morality is high. It is extolled in all mainstream religious traditions and in new age sects is usually adapted to represent a period when man was “attuned with nature and the divine” or in a perfect state.

Of course this Golden Age ends and moral decline sets in. The responsibility for such a disaster is usually placed firmly in man’s court. While the mythology varies, the “kicked out of the garden” legend persists. In modern new age thought we even get advanced tales of the lost continents of Mu and Atlantis which sunk beneath the waves due to man’s misuse of technology and science. The story may have become more complex, but the underlying ideology is the same.

Moral Decline brings with it such beliefs as the limited value of science (since only the divine has the answer), the dangers of modernism and technology (since we are moving away from the Golden Age not developing either as a culture) and a negative or neutral view of man and nature. Since we have left the Golden Age or Garden of Eden, man is in a state of sin and nature has either become polluted with evil or somehow corrupted. Moral Decline theory is usually creationist since it is marked by a devolutionary rather than evolutionary model.

These concepts are very significant as they create a distorted view of history based on an overarching master plan with religious meaning. Various Protestants sects produce amazingly complex maps of history showing how the whole flow of human history is marked by the seven days of creation from 4004 B.C. to the present.

This also relates to the importance given to creationism and Intelligent Design. In Hinduism huge charts of the cycles of history have been significant since the time of the Puranas, these cycles imparting meaning to history and suggesting a plan or intelligence to the flow of time. It is interesting that both Hindus and Protestants work together in promoting Intelligent Design in the United States.

Indeed a major text on the subject is *Forbidden*

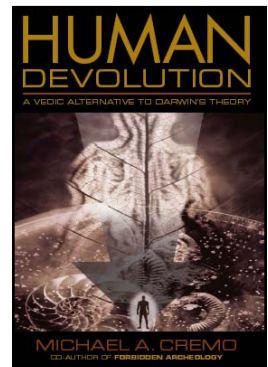
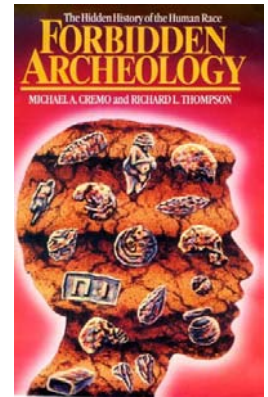
Archaeology by Cremo and Thompson (Torchlight Books 1998), two members of ISKCON (the Hare Krishna Hindu sect).

Their next book took the whole subject to a new low level, *Human Devolution* by Michael Cremo (Torchlight 2003) which argued that rather than man having evolved from the same stock as apes, apes are degenerate human beings. This seems to be the final world in the lunacy of devolutionary thinking.

The need to sacralise history is paramount in the mind of the religious and has far more influence on supposedly secular cinema than we may realize.

To begin with I will an example some films that reflect many of these themes in a general way and then I will hone in on films which have a specific eschatological interest. I have not covered evangelical films made by niche Christian filmmakers as they fall outside what we may define as general cinema. However such films as the *Left Behind* series, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, *The Moment After* and so on are more obvious examples in this genre.

Golden Age films all illustrate the concept of the perfect age or perfect civilization destroyed by moral decline. The vast majority of films about Atlantis such as *Beyond Atlantis* (1973), *The Man from Atlantis* (1977) right through to

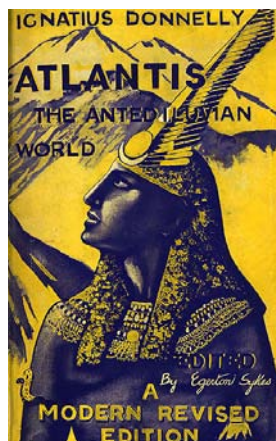


The legend of Atlantis

modern animated films such as *Milo: Atlantis Returns* (2003) express some aspect of the myth.

The Atlantis myth in film is interesting as it also includes some indication of the myth of ancient knowledge (these ancient civilizations knew far more than us) and moral decline through the misuse of science. Atlantis is usually described as having fallen into the sea because they misused ancient sciences passed to them from The Golden Age.

The myth of Atlantis in literature is a complex one which can be traced back to 1882 when Ignatius Loyola Donnelly published *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* detailing his theories concerning the mythical lost continent of Atlantis. The book sold extraordinarily well and is credited with initiating the obsession with Atlantis. His work also contributed to the emergence of interest in the ancient Maya. Thanks a lot Donnelly! Madame Blavatsky, the founder of that enigmatic 19th century religious movement Theosophy, took Donnelly's theories (and others) and produced the quintessential occult tomes on the Golden Age *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. Hodgepodes of pseudoscience and religious theories, they were well received by a world saturated with spiritualism and mysticism and helped bring Atlantis to an even greater readership.



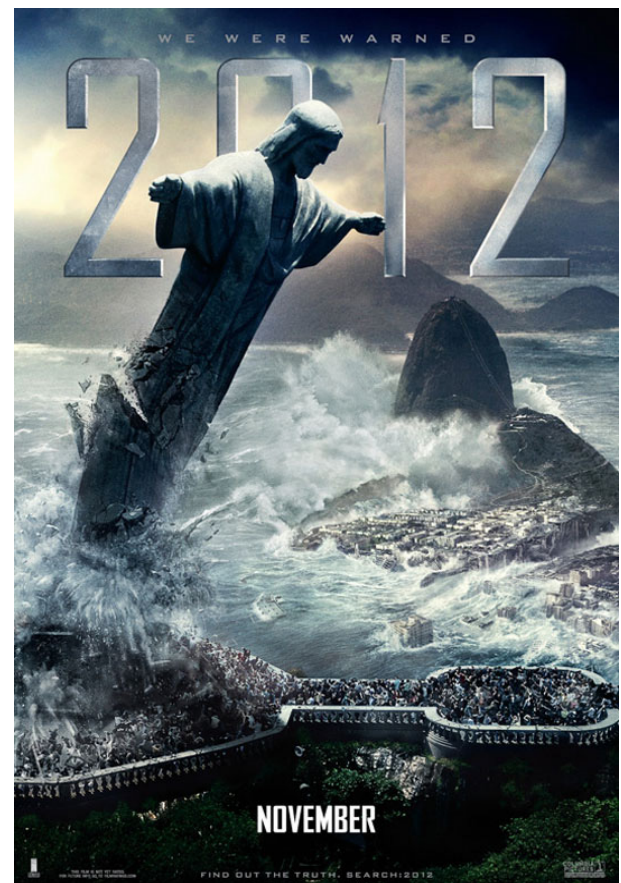
Madame Blavatsky

It is interesting to note that many films on Egypt and Rome also embody Christian ideas about moral decline. Since both were seen as enemies of Christendom, films abound showing them as examples of civilizations where evil ran wild with the Pharaoh in Egypt and Emperor in Rome depicted as embodiments of satanic pride. The films of Cecil DeMille helped create true epics of so many of the Biblical myths and along the way gave undue credibility to the themes the Bible embodied.

The imbuing of meaning into history is central to religious thinking. The theory that man may have evolved by random changes caused by natural selection especially galls the religious. *The Happening* (2008) is a prime example where a respected filmmaker M. Night Shyamalan allows his Christian belief to overrule all common sense and produce a work of epic nonsense.



When you have the main character, a science teacher calling evolution "just another theory" you know there is a problem. While it may push the right buttons with horror fans, its central theme about religious faith and Intelligent Design is so heavy handed it could nearly be placed in the category of evangelical cinema.

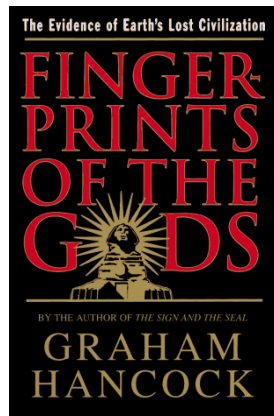


2012 (2010)

2012 is another big budget disaster-melodrama from Roland Emmerich of *Independence Day* and *The Day After Tomorrow* fame. Emmerich does tend to follow a formula with his films which he has honed to a fine art. There is lots

of action, overblown plots, little to no character development, an overemphasis on the nuclear family and wallops of sentimentality matched with over-the-top extremely high budget special effects.

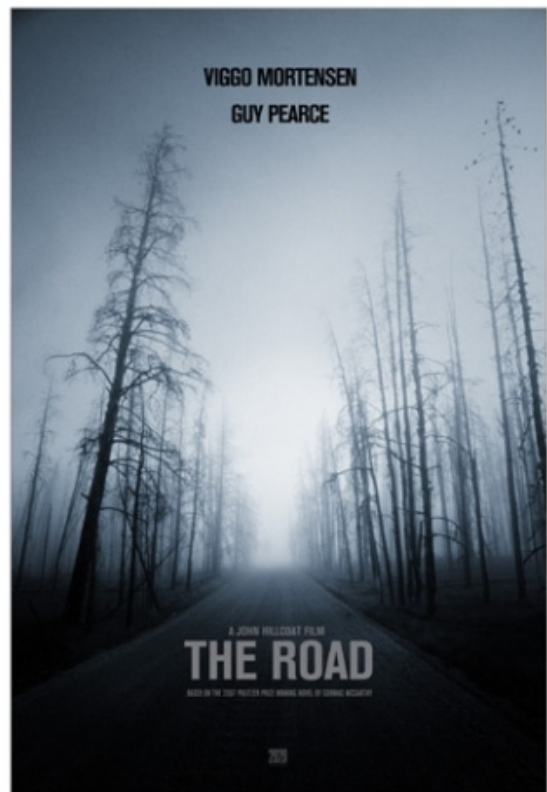
Using speculation about the end of world Emmerich ties together hokey religious superstitions, overwrought emotionalism and grand spectacle with quite astounding CGI. However, this is a film which really cannot be taken seriously in terms of plot or character development. The storyline takes its cue from new age speculation about the end of the world and mixes in all manner of pseudo-science. It tries to sound all scientific using references to the new age favourite pseudo scientist Charles Hapgood and spends most of the film revelling in the most ludicrous speculations. The credits mention the film is inspired by *Fingerprints of the Gods* by Graham Hancock. Hancock is celebrated by quack archaeologists worldwide for his unorthodox opinions.



If that is not enough 2012 celebrates religious lunacy as the people of the world unite in prayer rather than making any real effort to survive the impending cataclysm. Set pieces such as the roof on the cathedral in Rome crashing on believers end up having a truly dark and ironic sense of humour, one probably not intended by the filmmaker. Of course the United States finds out the truth about the coming catastrophe before anyone else and creates "arks" to save the cream of the crop to create a future world. What a future world it will be, filled with rich bloated bankers, billionaires and anyone else who can afford the one billion euro ticket to get on-board. To supposedly get us to feel the "personal" side of the tale Emmerich places his focus on Jackson Curtis, his ex-wife and her new husband and their two kids. It is so American apple-pie it is revolting. You just know that the new interloper husband will get it (which he does) and Jackson and his wife will get together again (which they do) and the nuclear family will be part of the foundation of the new world. Ahh shucks !

The Road (2009)

At first glance *The Road* is very different from other apocalyptic films. The world ends with a



whimper and a man with his pregnant wife are left alone in a world gone awry. After his wife gives birth she is left in a weakened state and leaves to die in the night and the father and son (unnamed) are left alone to wander the road to survive. The acting is superb, Viggo Mortensen and Kodi Smit-McPhee as the father and son are excellent. While the film could be seen as a humanist ethic, there is little religious content though the father and son team refer to themselves as "the good guys," who are "carrying the fire." My major issue is with the ending, which various critics have also noted. The father dies from the long journey and the son joins a new family group and moves off towards possible survival. The notion of the death of a



The nihilism of father and son in *The Road*

single parent family and its replacement with a nuclear family unit as the final sign of hope is problematic.

The Book of Eli (2010)

The Book of Eli is a bit like *The Road* by with a fundamentalist Christian message. It is bizarre that such a film would be made by mainstream filmmakers and include such respected actors as Gary Oldman and Denzel Washington. It is a tale of a post-apocalyptic world where Eli is carrying and protecting a book which represents the wisdom of a dead civilization and you guessed it, it is the Bible. This is truly horrid stuff kids, simplistic, narrow and stupid. While many media critics have tried to “read” the tale as representing the survival of any religious faith and the “Bible” as any holy book, that is not how the film communicates. It is the Bible and the Christian God which survives the world’s end. It is ironic in a sense since it could be argued that it is the views which the Bible represents which are likely to cause any global catastrophe. Without entering too far into polemic, the two major risks to modern man are global warming and terrorism and both come from problems caused by the three ugly sisters of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Genesis made it clear that God created man first, then woman and then the animals and



mankind has dominated and abused nature ever since. This sort of “Dominion” theology has been central to each of the Mosaic religions and can be traced directly to global warming via the excesses of the Protestant Work Ethic and the puritan values of make as much money as you can for God. The vast majority of terrorism comes from the Islamic terrorism, Christian far right nutters and Zionists. Indeed it has been argued that the world’s first terrorists were the Jewish zealots who declared war against their Roman occupiers. Any book could have been used to represent Western culture; a scientific text, a work of poetry, even Shakespeare. To use the Bible is an insult to the viewer’s intelligence, to say the least.

Central to many end of the world films is the motif of the family. With all religious traditions the family unit is a representation of the “Golden Age” in microcosm. It is the unit “god designed” and since most religious people can’t remember the Golden Age or the Garden of Eden, they project their utopian ideals onto the family unit and conservative values. In the west, this also results in the idealization of the 1950’s and its supposedly idyllic family values. Ranging from wife beating, backyard abortions and overprescribed valium to the constant use of electro shock and lobotomy, eugenics and chemical castration for homosexuality.

In 2012, the dysfunctional family is broken by the death of the interloper father and the original nuclear family reinstated to help kick-start the future. In *The Road* the ending where the one parent family is replaced with a nuclear family seems to have the same message. A variant of this model is the salvation of the fami-



Denzel Washington in Book of Eli



The Day After Tomorrow



The ridiculous end of the world patriotism of Armageddon

ly against ridiculous odds; this theme is found throughout End of the World and catastrophe films. For example in *The day After Tomorrow* (2004) Doctor Jack Hall treks through insanely dangerous conditions to save his son Sam who is snow bound in New York. It is an exaggerated film, filled with extreme scenarios and unbelievable set-pieces, not surprising considering it is made by the same director as *2012*.

Related to the theme of family is an emphasis on nationalism, this is especially prevalent in American disaster and End of the World films. *The Day After* (1983) was a prime example of Eighties nuclear fears but at least avoided undue jingoism. In later films the nationalistic fervour was moved up a pitch, a classic example being *Armageddon*.

The title alone puts the film in context; it is an End of the World drama but with religious overtones. The film is marked with nationalist and religious imagery, and even the president talks of Bible Prophecy. The language of the film is only equalled by the power of U.S militarism. It seems no country in the world has any technology in place to deal with a rogue comet and while NASA has failed (once again science is no good), the wisdom of the average U.S. worker is what is needed. A team of no-good drinkers and gamblers are redeemed (another very religious concept) by working together to save the world. Harry Stamper represents the old form of family (since he drinks and parties) and is replaced by A.J and his daughter when he dies at the conclusion of the film. Family, Country and American values; what more do we need to save the world?!



Mel Gibson in Mad Max

Even *Mad Max* (1979), the Australian cult dystopian post-apocalyptic film had elements of the family values message but with a twist. It is a post-apocalyptic world where fuel is scarce and moral decline has meant that the roads are ruled by gangs. When his wife and child are killed, Max decides to take the law into his own hands and becomes a "righteous" avenger against the gangs.

Armageddon is of further significance as it brings home the anti-science message of many of these films. NASA is constantly shown as incompetent and unable to achieve what a group of working class men can achieve. A ludite approach to technology where computers, technology and science are seen as a great threat to mankind is seen in such titles as *Robocop* (1987) which spawned two sequels and four television series, which explored the danger of technology in the hands of large corporations and the *Terminator* series which focused on computers gone mad.

I am Legend (2007) and *28 Days After* (2002) emphasizes the man-playing-god motif with viruses decimating humanity leaving either an individual or a family unit to fight against the odds. *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), *The Omega Man* (1971) also fall into this category. The fear of science and the future it will create is found in many futuristic science fiction films as *Logan's Run* (1976) but these are outside the



End of the World/Catastrophe genre we are covering here.

A further theme explored in the End of the World genre is man's relationship with nature. In the vast majority of these films nature is seen as something which be dominated or controlled. Whether it is a volcano, meteor or tsunami, man must confront and conquer uncontrolled nature and bring it under his will. This concept can be traced directly back to the Judeo-Christian theology of Dominion which is explicit within Genesis. Man must have dominion over the planet and its animals, it is his god-given right.

In some modern disaster films this has been modified by pagan and new age thought so that nature has been somehow corrupted or polluted by man and hence takes revenge on mankind. This sort of "religious" approach to climate change and nature disasters is worrying in that it distorts the evidence-based science behind the problems facing mankind and makes dealing with global natural disasters far more difficult in the long run.

Sadly it also is found in many "green" documentaries and really represents religious ideas which have been filtered through the mishmash which has become known as "new age" think-



Spanish Plane Disaster 2008

ing. This sort of speculation which ranges from the Gaia hypothesis to Goddess worship does nothing for the science of climate change.

Ultimately a religious approach to the end of the world is based on misplaced hope. It is a sort of insurance policy, offering surety against all odds in the event that disaster hits. However if we objectively examine the success thus far of religious insurance policies they has not done well.

When a plane crashes, the few survivors may thank God (the Virgin Mary or some other divine character) for their lives, but what about the lives of the others on the plane. Is God that capricious? For that matter why did God allow the disaster in the first place? Why didn't he stop the crash before it happened and hence have to avoid saving a few people at the expense of others?

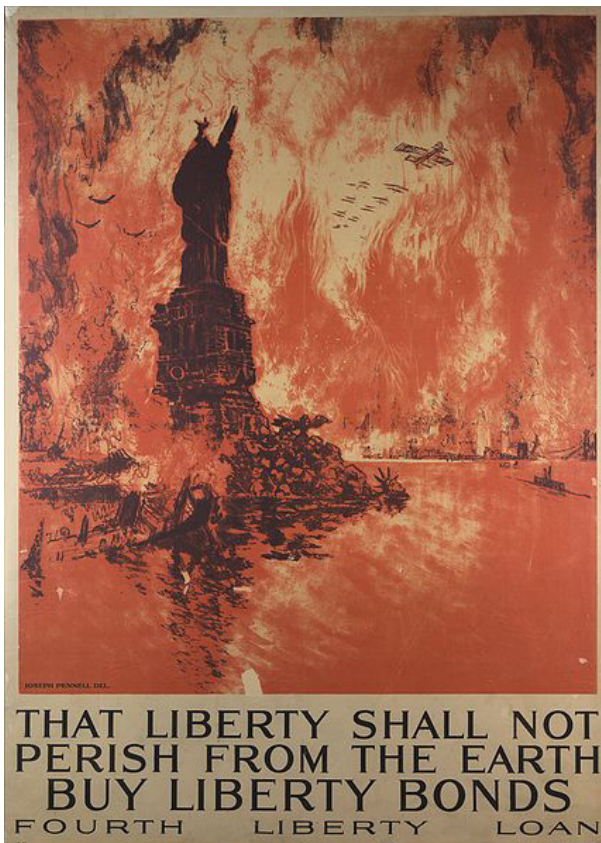
The whole religious insurance policy thing looks like a con job to me. When it comes to the end of the world it is much the same. You sign up for the policy, you agree to very restrictive policy conditions, pay your premium every week and have no real evidence that it will amount to much.

The superstitions of mainstream religious belief may be waning in the modern world but alternative health, new age and esoteric thought are on the rise and we must be aware of how these ideas saturate film, entertainment and literature. If we really stand a chance at making changes in the world in regards to climate change and the environment the first step is to view the problem objectively and examine the facts from a scientific perspective. But that is more easily said than done for most people as it would mean leaving a lifetime of superstition behind them first.



With Tokyo, it was monsters. If there was a stray monster anywhere in the world it would naturally gravitate to Tokyo to wreak havoc. As a recognisable symbol of the United States,

New York's Statue of Liberty has also come to be an icon of doom. The Twin Towers had nothing on the lady with the funny hat when it comes to attracting natural or manmade disasters – on film, at any rate.

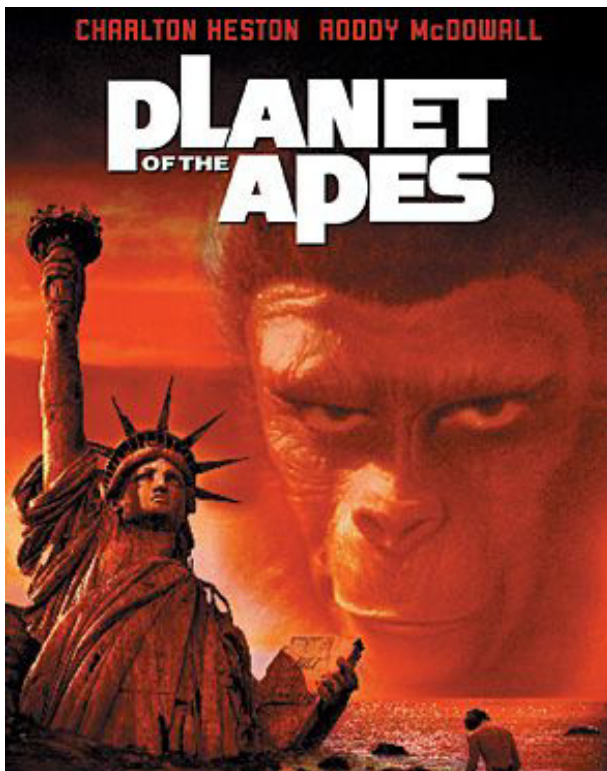


Surprisingly the first appearance of the Statue in a disaster seems to be down to the United States Government. A war poster for Liberty Bonds depicted the Statue in front of a blazing New York, a grim reminder of what could happen if you didn't fork over your money to Uncle Sam for War Bonds.

An early attempt at a natural disaster film was the 1933 *Deluge*. This film was thought lost until recently when an Italian-dubbed print was found.

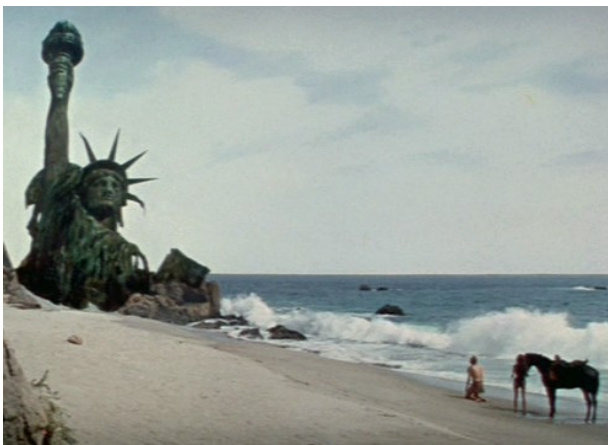
The statue was not destroyed, but was flooded by a tsunami caused by earthquakes along the





east coast. This turned out to be prophetic as far as later films were concerned. Tsunamis became a popular theme. Like *Godzilla* and *Tokyo*, the Statue of Liberty and tsunamis seem to go hand-in-hand.

The most striking image in film was at the end of *Planet of the Apes* (1968). The astronaut Taylor finds the statue half-buried on a lonely beach. He realises that he is on a future Earth where humans are now a lower form of animal life. In reality the statue's survival in these circumstances is quite unlikely. It is constructed from thin bronze sheets attached to a steel armature (skeleton). The steel would have rusted away long ago, but we aren't going to let reality stand in the way of a good story, are we?



The Classic Planet of Apes Scene

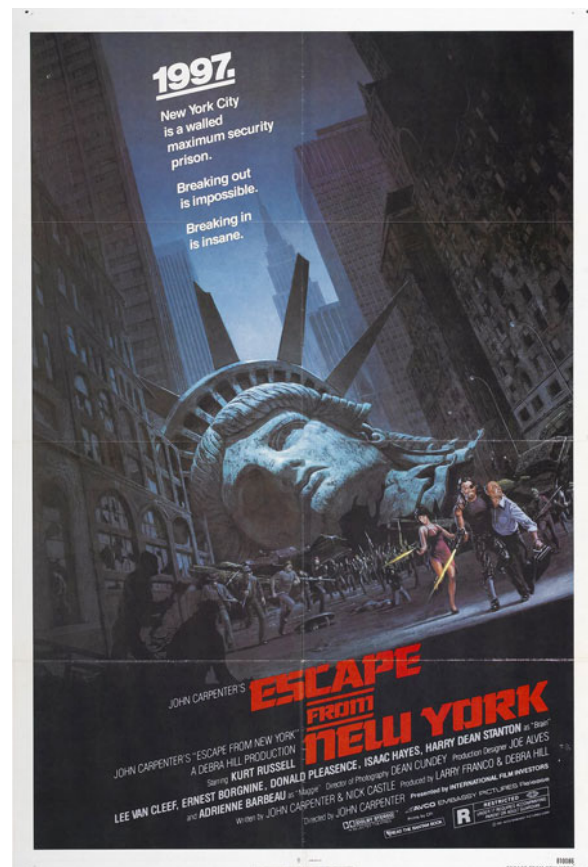


Escape from New York

This shot spawned a whole range of parodies in films like Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs* (1987), and the animated TV show *The Simpsons*.

In 1981 the head of the Statue appeared blocking New York streets in *Escape From New York*. Once again humanity has collapsed and the whole of New York has been turned into a huge prison. The head of the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of the freedoms of the New World to arriving immigrants, is a little incongruous here.

In the 2004 disaster film *The Day After Tomorrow*, a drama about climate change making the U.S. uninhabitable, the Statue appears almost covered in ice following a massive cold snap and a tsunami. Incidentally the Statue is facing the wrong way.





Independence Day

The film came from the makers of the unbelievable *Independence Day*.

In that film the Statue was destroyed by aliens, so you have been warned. *The Day After Tomorrow* scene was also parodied in the 2008 *Disaster Movie*, where the Statue is now better prepared with a face mask and snorkel. Billed as "Not Another Shallow Hollywood Movie" and subtitled "Al Gore Was Right", the film sank almost as quickly as the Statue.

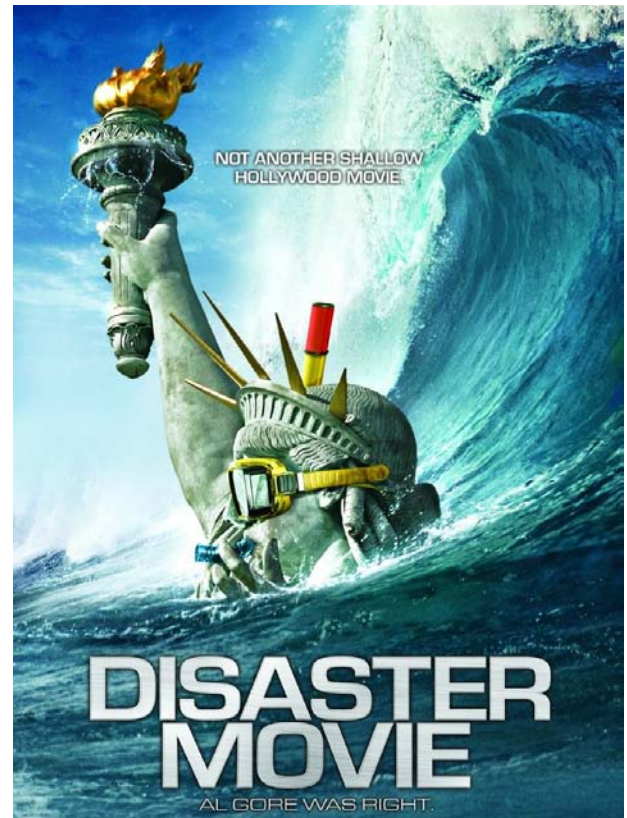
The 1998 film *Deep Impact* should probably have suffered the same fate. This time it's a meteor hitting Earth that causes all the mayhem



Deep Impact



The Day After Tomorrow



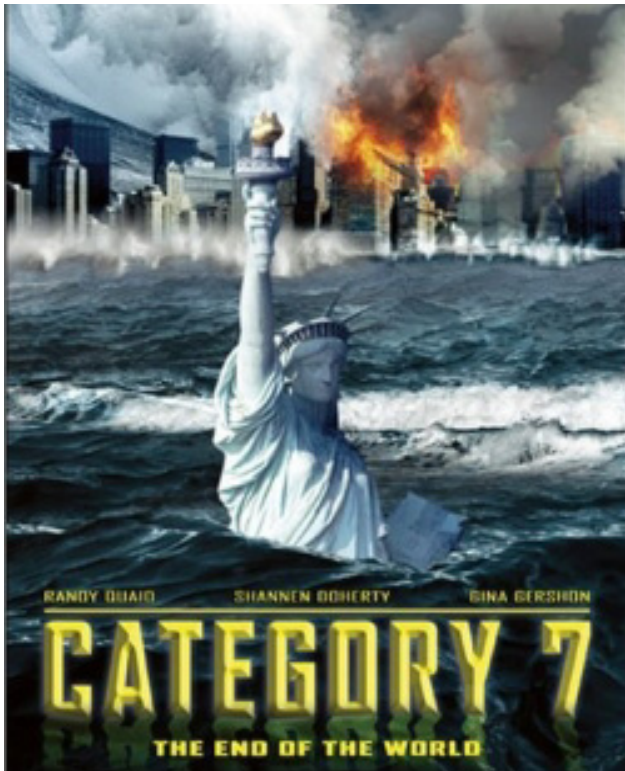
and once again the Statue cops it first. Again the head is bounced into the streets of downtown New York by the water, ignoring the fact that it should have disintegrated the first time it bounced off a building. The shot is mercifully brief.

A TV series, *Category 7: The End of the World* (2005) manages to throw in a bit of everything. As the world's climate disintegrates massive storms develop worldwide. Various storm cells spawn huge tornadoes that destroy world icons like the Eiffel Tower and, you guessed it, the Statue of Liberty.

The series has now been released on DVD and the cover shows New York on fire and flooded, an interesting combination.



AI: Artificial Intelligence



The Statue is, as usual, up to her waist in water but at least this time she is facing the right way so she can see what's coming at her. The Statue is yet again submerged in the 2001 SF film *AI: Artificial Intelligence*. As usual this is caused by global warming.

In a final tribute in the 2008 film *Cloverfield* the Statue is decapitated by a giant monster.

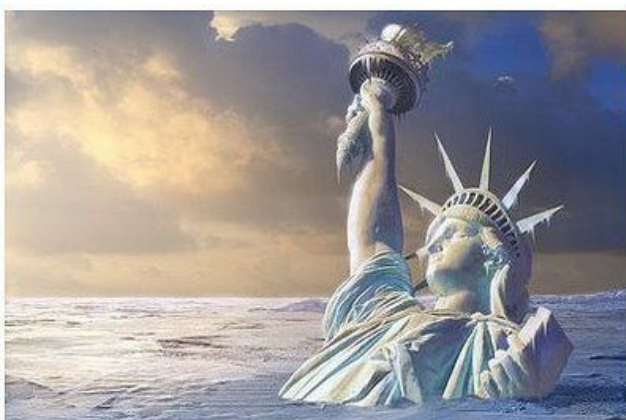
Did I say "final"? It seems unlikely that this will be the last attempt to destroy her. Americans seem divided about their icons – fiercely and patriotically protective of "their" statue, but quite ready to depict its destruction in the interests of making a buck.



There is one non-film parody of the films that should be mentioned.

In 1979 students of the University of Wisconsin constructed a "sunken" Statue on the ice of Lake Mendota. It's my favourite parody because it shows that even this far back some people were becoming aware of just how clichéd the Statue had become.

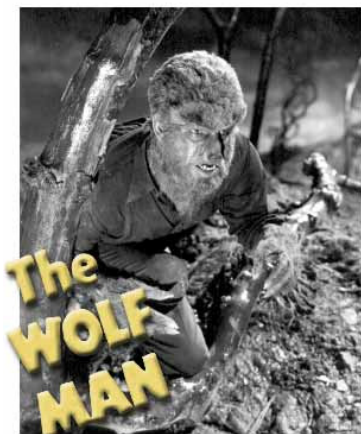
About the only method of destruction the filmmakers have left out so far is an attack by terrorists. That would probably be too tasteless, but far more realistic than the other scenarios shown in these films.



Another Cinematic Representation



University of Wisconsin



The werewolf in myth is a mostly European creature with many local variations. Also known as a lycanthrope, it appears to have been associated with the full moon. Apart from this, almost every detail in the legend varies depending on its region of origin. Among some American Indian tribes, for instance, the legend held that shape shifting into any other animal form was possible.

The word werewolf itself has a number of meanings. In Old English it comes from the words for "man" and "wolf", although an alternative interpretation is "wearer of wolf skin". The "man-wolf" interpretation exists in many other languages as well as Old English.

Becoming a Werewolf

While vampires were created by being bitten by another vampire, it is not so clear-cut for a werewolf. You could become a werewolf by being cursed (especially under the influence of a full moon), bitten or scratched by a werewolf, or eating human flesh (fresh or more usually from a corpse).

The origin of the "full moon" part of the legend is unknown but it occurs in the mediaeval writings of Gervase of Tilbury and may have been referred to by the Greek , Petronius, around the 4th century.

In a rare example of female werewolves, Scandinavian werewolves were held to be old women with poisoned claws (fingernails).

Of course the church had to get in on the act so excommunicated people could turn into werewolves, saints could curse people and turn them into werewolves, or you could be made into a werewolf by incurring the wrath of God (or the Devil). St Patrick is held to have turned Vereticus, a Welsh king, into a wolf.

There are also many individual legends of one-off conversions for various antisocial acts.

Characteristics of a Werewolf

Although the earliest werewolves of legend were completely wolf like, variations gradually occurred. These really reached their climax with the rush of werewolf films in the 20th century where the "wolfman" was more like a hairy human. This would be due more to the limitations of makeup and human physiology rather than to any particular legend.



A typical werewolf would have eyebrows that met in the middle, an elongated muzzle, sharp teeth, and of course superhuman strength and cunning. The body may or may not be anthropoid but would always be hairy. Curved fingernails could turn into claws. Werewolves were generally held to be tailless.

Shape shifting was a common attribute, especially in the non-European legends.



The change to a wolf was painless, but the change back to human form was painful and debilitating. They may also have suffered from depression as a result of remembering their crimes committed while in wolf form.

Killing a Werewolf

The earliest legends regarded forgiveness by a Deity as the only way to become human again.

During the 20th century the legend was expanded, with werewolves being hurt by contact with silver and being able to be killed by silver bullets, although there appears to be no earlier mention of this addition to the legend. It is attributed to scriptwriter Curt Siodmak, who also emphasised the connection with the full moon.

Wolfsbane, a herb, was held to be protection against them.

The church, not one to resist hijacking a folk superstition for its own ends, appears to have almost missed out on werewolves. Unlike vampires werewolves were immune to holy relics and artefacts like crucifixes and holy water. Exorcism was, however, held to work in some countries.

The werewolf could be "cured" in some cultures by surgery. This could involve striking the werewolf on the head with a knife (you have to wonder about the survival rate) or driving nails through the werewolf's hands.

There were other less drastic methods. You could address the werewolf by its real name three times and it would be cured. A Danish belief held that you could scold a werewolf and it would change back to human ("Bad dog!"?). It could also be cured if it converted to Christianity (naturally).

The Psychology of the Werewolf

While term werewolf werewolf or "man-wolf" is derived from the Old English *wer* or man, plus *wolf*, the term *lycanthropy* is used to differentiate the psychiatric condition from the imagery of myth and legend and comes from the Greek *works* for human and wolf.

The earliest accounts were found in Pliny the Elder and Vergil. There are many theories regarding the origin of the myth with it usually being connected to sexual suppression. In psychiatric teams werewolfism is seen as a form of

psychosis which results from sexual suppression and a crisis which causes its eruption in violent and chaotic forms.

These eruptions are so extreme that they are seen as bestial and in the past such individuals would be seen as possessed by the devil and hunted down and killed by members of their own communities. Families would shun a person showing signs of werewolfism as it was associated with being possessed by the devil and reflected on the whole family.

In a case covered in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* Vol. 134, No. 10. October 1977 by Harvey Rostenstock, M.D. and Kenneth R. Vincent, Ed.D. a woman reported werewolf like symptoms. These included delusions of werewolf transformation under stress, a preoccupation with religious phenomenology, including feeling victimized by the evil eye, an obsessive need to frequent graveyards and woods, primitive expression of aggressive and sexual urges in the form of bestiality and extreme forms of anxiety. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia and treated successfully.

Many of the motifs of the werewolf are related to madness such as the supposed transformation occurring on the full moon, the transmission of the disease by familial lines (as with some forms of mental illness) and the obsession with bestial sex. Some have argued that the most primitive use of wolf or animal possession within native tribes represented a healthy expression of pent up aggression and sexual desire.

However with the advent of Christianity and the demonization of all forms of paganism and the suppression of sexuality, the werewolf became an image of great fear. In many ways it is more feared than the vampire since a vampire can be controlled with a crucifix or holy water and those infected by it can be returned to normal life with the death of the master vampire. A werewolf infection can only be cured by death, in most cases by a blessed silver bullet.

Werewolves in film

Werewolves are first known to have appeared in entertainment in the early 1600s play *The Tragedy of the Duchess of Malfi*. A young lady is preparing to marry beneath her station and her two evil brothers, one of whom is a werewolf, plan to stop her or kill her. The play becomes a real horror story as the lady, her



children and lover are all destroyed.

Werewolves did not appear in film as quickly as the better-publicised vampires. Possibly this was simply because a hairy man wasn't as glamorous as a vampire. Vampires got the hot women, werewolves got fleas. Vampires had style, werewolves had bad hair days. The first film was the 1935 *Werewolf of London*. It was a rather confused tale as there was little literature to draw on and that was itself often contradictory. There are few of the themes so common in later films.

In 1941 Lon Chaney played the part again in *The Wolf Man*. With more elaborate makeup and a more sympathetic approach taken by Chaney, werewolves were suddenly a popular film topic.

This unfortunately led to an explosion of simply silly werewolf films in the post-World War II period. Many films of the style of XXX (insert popular comedians here) meet XXXX (insert choice of monster here) were produced for a film-hungry audience and did a lot to kill off the werewolf genre. Even monster vs. monster was tried by shameless producers – *Wolfman meets*



Dracula and others of that style.

Overseas production companies still produced some werewolf films for their local audiences but generally with more style and drama than their Hollywood counterparts. After a while it seemed the genre was only kept alive by firms like Britain's Hammer Films who specialised in low budget horror films. They made so many of these that the low budget ceased to be a handicap as they learned to make the most of each set and each costume. Their 1981 film *Curse of the Werewolf* is regarded as a classic.

Werewolf stories languished but there was a gradual revival through the 1980s and 1990s. 1981 was a good year for werewolf films. *An American Werewolf in London*, billed as a horror / comedy, was good enough to stand on its





Howling III Werewolf Nuns !

own as a horror film. It won the 1981 Saturn Award for best horror film. It deals with two young American students who are attacked on the wild moors by a lycanthrope and one is turned into a werewolf. As the next full moon approaches the need for action increases. Suicide becomes an option after a night of murder and mayhem in his new wolf form.

The Howling was a little more thoughtful and did much to return the genre to the horror mainstream. A reporter who has been interviewing a serial killer finds her way to The Colony, the killer's starting point. She doesn't realise that The Colony is a werewolf haunt and the serial killer was an outcast. The werewolves don't want any more publicity, so she finds herself in danger at every turn. One of the more ridiculous sequels in *The Howling* series was *Howling III: The Marsupials* which was set in Australia with werekangaroos and some rather cool werewolf nuns.

The werewolf in these films was more of a human in physiology, but slowly and with the extended use of CGI it was possible to return to



Werewolf from Twilight: New Moon

the true wolf shape.

By the end of the 1990s we saw an occasional werewolf film being released that had a decent budget and high production values. One such (and in my mind one of the better werewolf titles) is the 2002 film *Dog Soldiers*. This brilliant piece of British horror is set in the wilds of Scotland where someone (something?) is killing soldiers out on exercise. The best of the British army cannot stop the werewolves.

War Wolves, recently reviewed in Synergy, took an unusual twist. A group of American soldiers fighting in Afghanistan is attacked by werewolves and themselves become lycanthropes. Unusually for the genre they have the choice of whether to become full traditional werewolves





or, by not feeding on flesh, becoming only partly converted. They still have the superhuman strength and other attributes but lack the antisocial feelings of most werewolves. Of course, there will be a showdown between the true werewolves and the unconverted.

Another film well worth a look is *Twilight: New Moon*, also reviewed recently. In this story we have a group of vampires and werewolves effectively calling a truce with each other. The werewolves are from a local Indian tribe. They protect the human members of the community. So far the truce has been honoured but now a human girl has fallen in love with a vampire boy, but her best friend is a werewolf. The conflict between the three cultures is highlighted in the love story. It is far better than the usual rip-your-throat-out film and the CGI wolves are spectacular.

The *Underworld* series offers one of the more complex adaptations of the werewolf mythology. Over a sequence of three films it tracks the conflict between werewolves and vampires. The final film *Rise of the Lycans* explored the origins of the werewolf. It suggested that some long time in the past they had been bred as guards and slaves for the vampire caste.

However, when a master Lycan falls in love with the daughter of a vampire Lord and she is put to death for reciprocating a revolution unfolds which liberates the werewolves from the vam-



Lycans from the Underworld Films

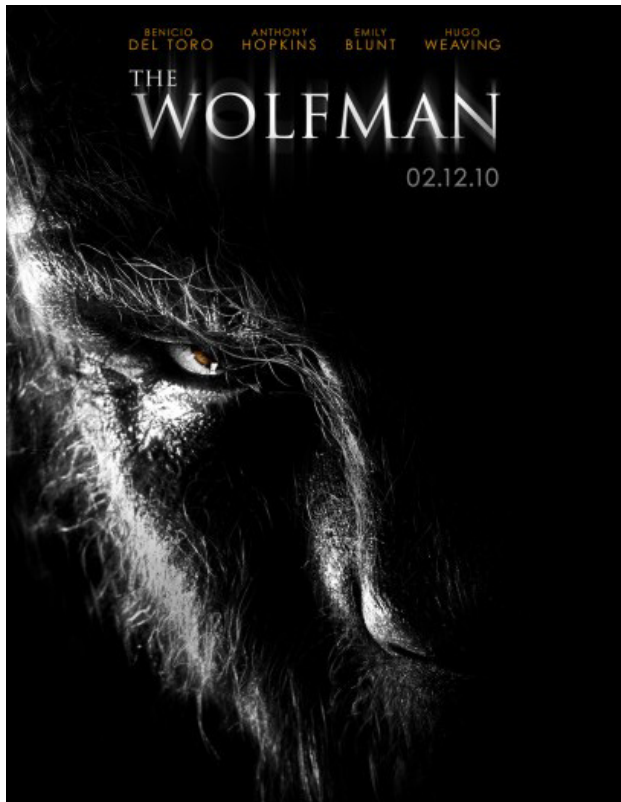
pires grip and makes them mortal enemies.

It was inevitable that the Wolfman film would be remade, but not without troubles. The new version starring Benicio del Toro was put back a number of times, had changes of directors, and generally suffered every possible problem. It finally screened in Australia in February 2010. I haven't seen it yet but it is set in 19th century London which should give it a period look better fitting the storyline. The extensive CGI allows a true four-legged lycanthrope and the film should be the better and more believable for this.

Finally, if you don't like your werewolves too serious, there is always the British *Wallace and Gromit and the Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005). A giant rabbit is terrorising the neighbourhood (in a genteel British way, of course) and it is up to heroic inventor Wallace and his faithful dog Gromit to save the Vegetable Show from destruction.

The Wolfman (2010)

The Wolfman is the latest werewolf film, this time from Universal. It is a remake of the 1941 classic horror film of the same name directed by Joe Johnston. It is an unusual film in that it is a period piece and only attempts to update the tale via character development and CGI. The Victorian era is superbly captured and the gothic mood of the period beautifully rendered. The director had the sense to appreciate that too many werewolf movies put the emphasis on the transformation, so he underplays it, some may argue to an alarming degree.



At the same time the final climatic werewolf vs. werewolf conflict seems to make up for lost time. The horror is certainly there but is primarily transmitted through the characters and mood. A secondary storyline, which certainly enhances the horror of the film, is on mental illness. Exploring the psychiatric model of werewolfism as lycanthrope, the film has some truly horrifying set-pieces in a mental asylum. In many ways the violence of Lawrence Talbot's werewolf nature is seen as something he cannot help in juxtaposition to the human cruelty of the psychiatrist and staff at the Asylum.

Lawrence Talbot works as a travelling actor. He has not returned to his family home since he



Hopkins as Werewolf



Del Toro and Hopkins in Wolfman

was placed in an asylum after the death of his mother. He is haunted by memories of his father, as a werewolf, killing his mother. After a performance he is contacted by Gwen Conliffe, his brother's fiancée, who tells him his brother has gone missing and asks for his help. While he is reluctant to return to Blackmoor, the narrow village in which he grew up, he feels he owes it to his brother and begins the long journey. When he arrives he is shocked to find that his brother has been brutally slain and his body left by the roadside.

As he begins his own investigation of his brother's death he must deal with the insular attitudes of the townsfolk and the fanaticism of the local preacher. However when he uncovers stories of various local deaths by a devil-like beast he visits the local gypsies to investigate. This leads him not to come face to face with the beast but to be bitten himself and receive the curse. As he slowly realizes what is happening to him he must deal with the dark secret of the Talbot family and Aberline, a Scotland Yard inspector, who is on his trail.

It is surprising to see a gothic film with such well-developed themes and characters. The various actors are superb in their roles; Anthony Hopkins is marvellous as the Talbot patriarch and Hugo Weaving brings a sparkle to the role of Inspector Aberline. Themes abound throughout this film including conflicts between generations, the nature of mental illness, the fanaticism of the clergy, the narrowness of village life and the effects of childhood abuse which resonate throughout life.

This is intelligent horror cinema, filled with mood and suspense, character development and plot. It explores a myriad of themes yet offers lots of action, superb CGI and some even some humour. This is one of the better werewolf films I have seen in a very long time.

Werewolves: The Dark Survivors Animal Planet (TV Release)

Werewolves: The Dark Survivors takes a very different approach to werewolves, it is a faux documentary, beautifully presented and immensely satisfying. The film mixes together a mockumentary with a detective/crime drama and a horror tale to create a very different take on the werewolf legend. It was originally broadcast on Animal Planet on Halloween and has been shown on ABC2 in Australia.

The plot is ingenious; it opens with a detective investigating a brutal killing in the Great Lake region of the United States which looks like it has been done by a wild animal. However as the investigation deepens he finds that the victim has a rare and unusual form of rabies and that the footage of the killing seems to show a human of extreme strength and unknown agility undertaking the killing. When the detective begins working with an animal investigator he finds that a body with a similar strain of rabies has been found but it is over a thousand years ago. Soon a hidden history of the werewolf is revealed from earlier Viking times right through to the present.

As they trace the alleged killers, they find the situation far more complex. It seems that there is a werewolf clan in the vicinity but they are the victims. Modern werewolves live like wolves in the wild, surviving in packs and protecting each other. They have controlled their instincts and when they transform are controlled by other members of the pack and hence only attack deer and wild animals. However, occasionally, an outsider may be bitten and become a werewolf by bite rather than blood. These outsiders are a grave risk as they are not ruled by the tra-



Controlled werewolf transformations

ditions of the pack and have no aversion to attacking humans. They are also jealous of the security the pack brings and will attempt to destroy the unity of the pack and take on the Alpha male werewolf.

This bringing together of wolf lore with legends of lycanthropy and a detective/crime story makes this a very unusual and successful werewolf tale. Using cinematography and presentation similar to traditional animal documentaries give it a truly credible feel. Indeed some reviews claim that during the first airing in the U.S. people believed the show was real and during the rabies outbreak section rang their local police stations !

The Dark Survivors (below)



The Tiger Lillies

The Tiger Lillies are not like any other band you are going to hear, now or later. They bill themselves as "The world's foremost Death Oompah band" and offer a musical excursion into the darkside of human nature. Their subject matter ranges from freaks to dark children's tale, criminals to circus life. What is most fascinating is the power of their presentation; it would be too easy for such contraband subjects to become a form of artistic indulgence yet in the hands of The Tiger Lillies it becomes a means to discuss the human condition with quite terrifying honesty. In their earliest years their work was little known and shocked the punters, while it continues to shock and entertain in equal amounts, it now reaches a much larger audience who appreciate their unique take on the world. When Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, directed a music festival in Britain earlier this month, he declared the Tiger Lillies to be his favourite band and they have received excellent reviews for their shows worldwide.

Their latest work was revealed at the Biennale in Sydney (2010). It was a "post-punk neo-Brechtian opera" called *Cockatoo Prison*, it was staged on Cockatoo Island an ex penal colony in Sydney Harbour.

The Tiger Lillies are comprised of:

Martyn Jacques
Vocals, Accordion.

The founder of The Tiger Lillies who spent most of his early years living above a brothel in London's Soho. His songs describe, in lurid and perverse detail, pimps, prostitutes, drug addicts, losers and other unsavoury characters.



Adrian Huge
Drums, Percussion, Toys.

"James Joyce on drums" exclaimed David Byrne on seeing Adrian Huge at work with the Tiger Lillies. In 1982 Adrian co-founded Dover's only



surreal, theatrical jazz/punk/calypso comedy ensemble Uncle Lumpy and the Fish Doctors. The group floundered shortly after arriving in London in 1989 which coincided with the formation of The Tiger Lillies and the start of his bashing ever smaller, recycled drums, toys and kitchen-ware in The Tiger Lillies.



Adrian Stout
Contra Bass, Musical Saw, Theremin, Vocals.

Adrian Stout has played Blues, Jazz, Country, and other musical forms in various known and lesser known bands throughout the UK, Europe and as far afield as India. He recorded two albums for Blues diva Dana Gillespie



before being co-opted by The Tiger Lillies for 1995's Edinburgh Festival. This once serious musician has since then found himself dancing in leider hosen, making love to inflatable sheep and dressing as a cheap prostitute.

Cockatoo Prison

Cockatoo Prison is their most recent work and has just been released in CD. It was created when The Tiger Lillies were commissioned to create a song cycle of crime for the 17th Biennale of



Sydney in May 2010. Cockatoo Island is the site of a former prison, shipyard and girls reformatory school and has a terrible past. The cycle of songs they have created is probably the most confronting of all their work and is a powerful experience.

Documenting the crimes and lives of the most reviled members of society from the murderer and rapist to the paedophile and shit terrorist (!), it will not be everybody's idea of a good time. However, this is not just misanthropy, while that is not a bad thing, it is an honest appraisal of those who are "beyond the pale" and a discussion of how they arrived in their present condition. It would be ever so easy to simply write this off as a sick celebration of the criminal. Yet if you listen to each song carefully and consider the horrifying spectacle presented to you, it is soon apparent that the CD is about what drives the human species to do such terrible things to each other and offers quite some insight into the dark shadow which mankind reflects across the globe.

Another album I especially enjoyed is *Seven Deadly Sins* which dates from 2008. It presents a selection of punkish style cabaret songs which chart man's fall from grace into the evils of vice with a new song for every form of sin. All presented with the usual dark flair which we may expect from The Tiger Lillies.



*Welcome to the Carnival of Circus Freaks
The Bleeding Lady the blood from her leaks
Here is a place where you can buy crack
Lobotomised whores who you can slap."*

In 1999 The Tiger Lillies produced a CD called *Circus Songs* which explored the world of the outcasts who live in the circus. *The Freakshow* expands these themes and explores the lives of The Snake



Woman, Three Legged Jake, Rosa with three Hearts, the Fat Lady, Deathless Man, Normo, Bleeding Lady, Matchstick Man, Flipper Boy, The Bleeding Lady, Ugly Joe, Hairy Man and the Sleeper. It is a fascinating excursion into the sideshow and is a bit like the classic 1932 film *The Freaks* by Tod Browning but in audio format. The question it asks who is really the freak, them or you?

In 1998 The Tiger Lillies released *Shockheaded Peter*, a bizarre and wonderful exploration of the twisted children's stories of Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*.

Der Struwwelpeter (1845) was a German children's book



by Heinrich Hoffmann. It presented ten illustrated and rhymed stories, mostly about bad children. Each has an obvious moral message but presents the consequences of bad behaviour in an outrageously exaggerated manner. There is some debate about the intent of the book, most see it as a satire on the works of moral instruction which were circulating at the time. Literally translated, Struwwelpeter means Shaggy-Peter and The Tiger Lillies took this amazing book and created a truly stupendous series of songs from it.

The Tiger Lillies have produced a wealth of music as well as some fascinating books, it is well worth visiting their website and spending some time visiting with them:

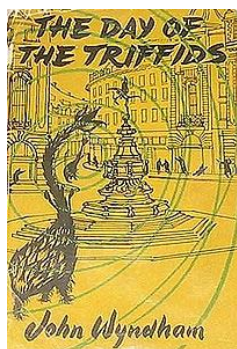
The Tiger Lillies
<http://www.tigerlillies.com>



A History of Triffids

The Day of the Triffids is a widely popular post-apocalyptic novel written by the English science fiction author John Wyndham in 1951 by Doubleday and Company, it was also serialized in *Colliers Magazine*.

Wyndham wrote many other titles before and after *Day of the Triffids*, but it is his best known and most successful title. While Wyndham acknowledged the influence of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* on *The Day of the Triffids*, however it's plot and the unique focus on



the "Triffids" make it a distinctly original work in its own right. It has been heralded as one of the most significant works of science fiction.

There has been some debate on the scientific origin of the concept of the triffids. Since the book states that the triffids originated in the Soviet Union many have focused in on the work of Soviet Biologist Lysenko. Lysenko developed a unique theory, which came to be known as Lysenkoism, which departed from traditional theories of genetics and argued for the heritability of acquired characteristics. This was a theory which held much sway in the U.S.S.R and other communist countries of the period. His theories had a strong influence over the practise of agriculture in the Soviet Union and later in China. While his theories were largely refuted, some

similar lines of thought have arisen at the edges of the field of epigenetics, which has even been called Neo-Lysenskoism by its critics.

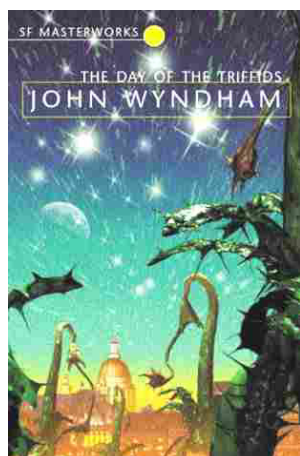
While later adaptations of the tale focus on issues relating to genetics and science, the novel itself has a strongly anti-communist feel. It also explores the way in which human nature, flawed as it is, contaminates any political system; with the totalitarian the most at risk. It also explores the human reaction to a disaster focusing on the themes of self-interest versus cooperativeness.

A Synopsis of the Book

The triffids are really the central figure of the book; they were bioengineered in the Soviet Union but when a plane is shot down carrying their spores, they spread worldwide. This is both a blessing and a curse, their oil is superior to existing vegetable oils, but they are unpredictable and dangerous. They are marked by an ability to move about on three leg-like appendages, have a form of communication and intelligence and protect themselves with a poisonous sting that enables them to kill their victims as food.

Bill Masen has made his living working with them but is now in hospital as he was splashed with triffid venom during a lab experiment. His eyes are bandaged and he misses an unusual meteor show which lights up the entire sky. (In the book it is later suggested that this may have also been a military weapon that was accidentally triggered by an "unknown" power i.e. the Soviet Union).

The next morning when he wakes up the hospital is very different from the one he signed into, it is dead silent. He finds the world around him in utter panic and learns that the meteor shower/weapon of the previous night has rendered everyone who saw it blind. He removes the bandages from his sensitive eyes and steps forward into a London he doesn't recognize; filled with panic, destruction, violence and madness. He meets a sighted novelist, Josella Playton and they band together to help each other. Soon biology takes over and they take an emotional interest in each other



and a deep bond is formed. They see a light in the distance and find a group of sighted survivors at London University.

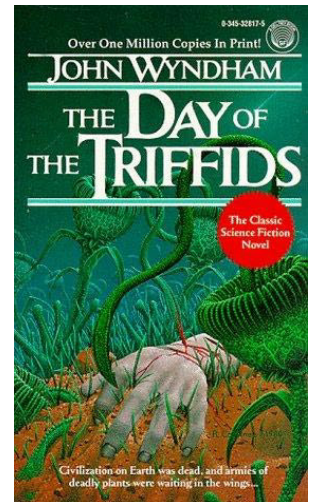
This group is led by Beadley, a social radical. He wants to establish a community in the countryside where sighted men take several wives to rebuild the population of the world. Needless to say this does not impress the religious among the group especially the devout Miss Durrant who is another leader of the group. As the clash of personalities deepens a more serious problem intervenes.

Wilfred Coker makes a very rash decision; he stages a small fire at the university and kidnaps a number of sighted individuals including Bill and Josella. He chains them each to a group of blind people forcing them to lead their ragtag bands around London looking for food and supplies. This doesn't work especially well considering the triffids which are on the loose and competing gangs, one of which is led by Torrence.

Bill tries to make the most of his situation but soon disease begins to ravage those in his community so he leaves and begins to search for Josella. He is accompanied by Coker but doesn't really trust him. Their first stop is a Christian survivalist community called Tynsham ran by the devout Miss Durrant but they continue to search to search Josella. Bill remembers Josella mentioning a country home in Sussex, so sets off in search of her, Coker returns to Tynsham.

Bill is joined on his search by a young girl named Susan, together they locate Josella at Sussex House. Bill and Josella consider themselves a couple and Susan their child. Together they try and create a self-contained community. However even with years of work they find the triffids are becoming more numerous and dangerous and their community is floundering.

One day they see a helicopter land outside their property and they are invited to join a colony on the Isle of Wight. They do not wish to leave the land they have worked on for so long but find





themselves between a rock and a hard place when they are visited by soldiers from a new fascist government which is setting up feudal type communities around the country. Bill recognizes the leader, Torrence, he was a gang leader who attacked them when he was in London. Torrence announces his intention to place blind survivors under the Bill's care and to move Susan to another enclave to care for other blind survivors. They disable the soldiers' vehicle and flee under the protection of night. They join the Isle of Wight colony and work to create a new future.

Adaptations

The novel was read on the radio by the BBC as early as 1953 with a series following in 1957 and 1968. Further BBC radio productions followed in 1971, 1973 and 1980. In 2001 writer Lance Dann adapted the series in two hour long episodes for the BBC World Service.



The Day of the Triffids (1962) Film

The Day of the Triffids (1962) was directed by Steve Sekely and produced by George Pitcher. It has not dated especially well but does offer a fascinating combination of a post-apocalyptic disaster film and a late fifties/early sixties type monster film. Okay, we should be clear that the triffids look like men in suits and the special effects are pretty cheesy but that just adds to the quaintness of the film and if you are willing to overlook its limitations it is an enjoyable adaptation.

There are lots of impressive set-pieces such as the hysteria in the about-to-crash airplane because the pilot suddenly lost his eyesight or when Masen stand on the edge of the quarry watching the triffid spores becoming airborne. There are some strange additions. There is a story about a marine biologist and his wife working to understand the triffids while isolated in an isolated in a lighthouse which seem a little incongruous with the rest of the film. This is because these were intercut into the film by director Freddie Francis as the studio complained



1960's style schlock sci fi



that the original film was too short for cinema release!

Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction Comic The Day of the Triffids Comic Book Style

In 1975 Marvel Comics adapted the story in the magazine *Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction*, which was Marvel's attempt to create an adult oriented science fiction magazine.

It was sadly short lived, only running for six



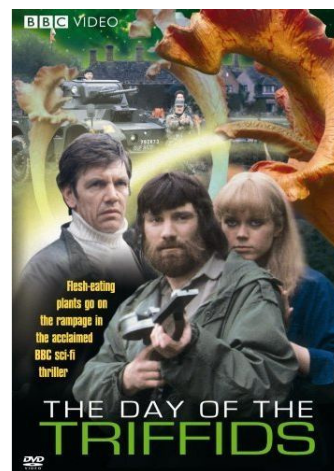
issues during 1975 with a special issue in 1976. The triffids story was presented in two parts produced by two different artists, the first section had art by Andru and Ernie Chan and the second part was illustrated by Rico Rival. It was produced in black and white comic style and well received.

The Day of the Triffids BBC TV 1981

A television version was produced by the BBC serial in 1981 starring John Duttine as Bill Masen. It is still considered by many to be the definitive version of the tale on film and has been regularly repeated on TV and released on DVD. One of the reasons the TV series is so well

regarded as it is able to explore the plot of the book in far more detail than the various films. In the U.K. it had six episodes of 30 minutes each, in Australia, three one hour episodes.

This serialization really got inside the story exploring not only the Triffids but the breakdown of society and, more importantly, individual reactions to societies collapse. While finances clearly limited the special effects used in the series, the superb acting, character development and the sheer depth of the plot more than makes up for its limitations.



Triffid 1981 BBC Style



The Day of the Triffids BBC TV 2009

In December 2009 the BBC broadcast a new version of the tale written by *ER* and *Law and Order* writer Patrick Harbinson. It stars Dougray Scott as Bill Masen, Joely Richardson as Jo Playton, Brian Cox as Dennis Masen, Vanessa Redgrave as Durrant, Eddie Izzard as Torrence and Jason Priestley as Coker.

This adaptation removed the cold war/Soviet focus as well as the explorations of sex, gender and repopulation of the earth instead focusing in on the social dynamics of surviving a catastrophe.

The triffids are genetically engineered by a large corporation to solve the problem of fuel in response to global warming and the earth's population is blinded by a solar flare. The DVD and Blu Ray is released in Australia by Anchor Bay.

John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* has been dramatised several times before and while a bit dated now, the ideas contained within it are fertile enough to trigger new growth.

The mini-series from BBC goes for three hours and offers an interesting new vision of the original tale with a strong emphasis on post-



Two solid major lead characters: Bill Masen and Jo Playton

apocalyptic psychology.

Fans of older versions will bitterly complain about changes to the plot and the emphasis in this new series but I think we need to accept that ever new adaptation while taking inspiration from the original does not need to slavishly follow it. I am quite sick of fanatical fans decrying changes to original plots as some sort of sacrilege; the reality is that any story is going to be changed, sometimes radically, for the big screen and that each adaptation while taking some inspiration from the original, will be primarily the director's and screenwriters take on the tale. This version of *The Day of the Triffids* must be allowed to stand or fall on its own merits.

The climate change angle of the story is well developed. Taking a carnivorous plant and genetically engineering it to supply oil to resolve



Triffid 2009 Style



Eddie Izzard as a superb post apocalyptic psychopath

the world's dependence on fossil fuel is an excellent foundation to the story. The look of the plant harvesting factories, the genetically engineering process and the secrecy of multinational companies all ring true.

The well-meaning but insane behaviour of the "triffid" liberationist is found all too often in the modern world where animal liberationists let wild animals free in urban environments thinking they are saving them.

Combining the two with a global event (in this case a mass blinding caused by solar flares) works well and sets the stage for some superb storytelling and solid character development.

The CGI used throughout the film while significant does not overpower the tale, the catastrophes in the first episode (Day One) really set the stage for the more significant tale of how people behave when a worldwide disaster occurs, especially the opening plane crash.

The triffids are stunning and you really do not see them in all their glory until the end of the first episode and this helps develop the suspense, the colour depth on the Blu Ray edition is quite superb.

The major focus of the tale is on various characters who represent different responses to the disaster. We have a small team of government officials who work in isolation aiming to relocate



Excellent special effects judiciously used to emphasize, not detract from, character and plot

to the country and start civilization again with no thought of the millions of blind wandering aimlessly throughout the countryside or the triffids.

They pale in significant to the tale of Coker and Torrence. Major Coker believes that by handcuffing sighted people with the blind he can force them to look after them, a move with lots of heart, but somewhat misguided, especially with the Triffids about. Torrence, however, is another sort of character altogether. He is essentially a sociopath who takes over Coker's operation and grabbing control of No.10 creates his own military dictatorship based in London.

There are lots of interesting characters which reflect on how people would respond to a global disaster. Vanessa Redgrave plays Durrant, a nun who seems to really care about her flock until we realize she regularly feeds the triffids with ailing members of her community to keep them at bay.

The central tale of course is the story of Bill Masen, the triffid biologist and Jo Playton, the media broadcaster and their quest not only for survival but to somehow neutralise the triffids. They also offer the love interest in the story but surprisingly this is, for once, not overplayed!

The Day of the Triffids offers a solid sci-fi experience, balancing well used special effects with character development, thought provoking themes and a new and interesting adaptation of a well-worn science fiction classic.

It is a fascinating journey to see how a book written in 1951 has travelled through numerous editions, comics, films and TV finally to become a major release in 2009.

Meteor Apocalypse
2009
The Asylum Pictures
Peacock Films
R4 DVD

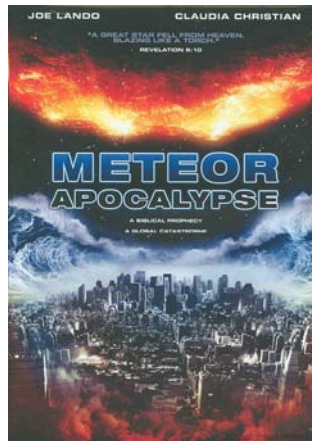
Yes, folks, once again it's the end of the world. A rogue comet that was headed for Earth has been smashed by nuclear warheads but some of the fragments have kept going.

In California the fragments have contaminated a major dam with a chemical poison that has also got into the water table. With no drinking water the state has turned to anarchy almost instantly.

The Department of Homeland Security has responded by rounding up people from the contaminated areas and putting them in concentration camps. The Centers for Disease Control have tried to arrange for their transport to a safer area since they know Los Angeles is due for the next meteor shower, but they have been taken over by a zealous and ambitious official from Homeland Security who doesn't care about the people illegally rounded up.

There is an antidote to the poison. It is being carried by David who wants to use it to save his poisoned daughter. He has obtained a small stock of the experimental drug from a friend in Las Vegas just before that city was destroyed. Now he must get the drug back to Los Angeles to the quarantine camp.

This will be difficult as every vehicle he gets into seems to become a meteor target. Along the way he picks up an attractive young lady as a travelling companion. The moment they kiss you



Meteor Shower

know she is marked for death as this conflicts with the family value motifs so important to Americans in this sort of film.

In Los Angeles they find the camp has been evacuated. They are sheltered for the night by a female pastor in her church. The next morning moments after they have left the church it and the pastor are destroyed by the next meteor shower. Maybe God has a warped sense of humour?

They travel to the outskirts of the city where the girlfriend dies, the wife is found and their daughter is saved, all in accordance with the usual practice in these stories.

Meteor Apocalypse is a low budget film but doesn't look like one. In spite of this it is vaguely dissatisfying. It's not that it is a bad film – it isn't – but the déjà vu feeling persists right through the film.

There is nothing original in the plot, the tiresome family values theme is there in full force, even the meteor impact shots look familiar. Even so, it's a decent thriller and is worth a look.



Lots of explosions



A human drama

**10,000 A.D.
Legend of the
Black Pearl
Indican Pictures
R1 DVD**

Black Pearl 10,000 A.D. opens with a voice over describing the state of the present day with images of current world problems leading to an atomic catastrophe. As the world attempts to recover from the attack, it is plunged back into primitivism and what is left of humanity has split into two tribes – The Huron and the Plaebian.

The Huron age slower than the Plaebians and hence are more mature and more “spiritually developed”. They are a warrior tribe who use meditation and martial training as their way of life. The Plaebians work the valleys attempting to tame the wilderness but are over populated and stretching their resources to the limits and hence suffering from the effect of disease. Soon, however, a new terror arises, the Sinasu which is killing them both.

However, there is a prophecy about a warrior which will arise and defeat the evil. Kurupi, the one who many think will be the warrior, is superbly played and his doubts and inner turmoil are well presented. The climactic scene which reconciles the trials and reveals the real “saviour /warrior” is well thought out and a meaningful plot twist. I also liked the fact that the “evil one” was one a Huron who thought he was on the side of good; there is nothing as dangerous as a crusader!

Black Pearl 10,000 A.D. is a very unusual film, it features beautiful cinematography, a lilting new age music score and enough buff men to fill a muscle calendar. The story is told more by images, music and poetry (with some voice over dialogue) than in a narrative manner and is communicated in a mythic form. I found the martial arts and meditative aspects interesting, but the overemphasis on mysticism and “new age” imagery took the film into truly ridiculous territory very quickly.

That being said the environmental message within the film was strong and resonant and



Men in loincloths do battle

many of the ideas within the film were certainly thought provoking, even if presented in a way that lacked a certain subtlety.

Black Pearl 10,000 A.D. is a visual feast, the crew filmed in some twelve national parks and the canyons, waterfalls and natural landscape is quite awe inspiring, it is certainly a back-ground for a film.

The artificial language created for the film also created a unique feel which helped back up the suggestion that this was a post apocalyptic world.

This is a strange film which seems to be a cross between a modern hippy fable and a new age environmental film. It has superb cinematography but is marred by a plot and acting which seems to border on the comic. The way in which the characters explore their “spiritual” side becomes so truly outlandish that you scratch your head in total disbelief.

For me this is how not to make an environmental film, it is saturated with mumbo jumbo and ends up being a comedy rather than a serious work of cinema.

Web: <http://www.indicanpictures.com/>

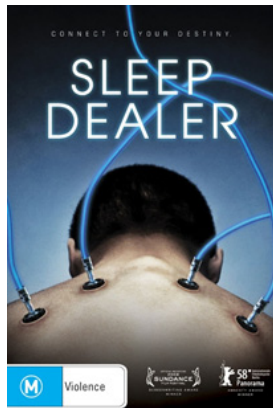


Martial Arts and new age mumbo jumbo

Sleep Dealer
Reel DVD
R4 DVD

*Spanish with English sub-
titles*

With strife currently rising along the U.S. – Mexico border once more, this film is a timely reminder that there is another side of the story.



Just slightly in the future the large corporations are taking over the world's resources. In the village of Santa Ana del Rio the river has been dammed by a multinational. The water is sent "far away". The local farmers must now buy water to keep their parched crops alive. Memo, the son of one of the farmers, would like to get out of the village but can't abandon his family. He contents himself with tinkering with radio receivers. One night he picks up a transmission from a gunship pilot who belongs to the paramilitary security forces of the company that owns the dam. They are destroying "aquaterrorists" who would steal "their" water. The company also picks up Memo's interception and next day while he is away his home is destroyed by an air attack. It is a new pilot's first kill and he is deeply affected by the sight of Memo's father staggering from his burning house. The pilot is then ordered to machinegun the father.

Memo knows there can be no future for him in the village so he heads for Tijuana where he hopes to find work in a "Sleep Dealer". These are so named because if you work there long enough you will go to sleep on a shift. This can cause tremendous destruction. The workers are fitted with computer jacks called Nodes and can plug into the factory computer which in turn hires out their services over a network to operate networked robots elsewhere. Memo's robot is constructing a skyscraper, possibly in Chicago. He will never see the results of his work since entry to the U.S. is banned. The Sleep



Dealers are a way for the U.S. to get the cheap labour it needs without having to allow immigrant workers. They have now completely blocked off the Mexican border and manual labour or dangerous jobs are contracted out to the sleep dealer factories. The pay is reasonable, although heavily taxed by the multinational banks. Memo is able to send money home. The hours are long and exhausting and there is always a danger of going to sleep on the job but they are fed oxygen to keep them sharp.

Memo has met Luz, an unsuccessful writer. She is also fitted with nodes, like so much of the population, so she can download vision directly from her memories and do a voiceover on it. She has written up her meeting with Memo and is surprised to find an interested buyer. The buyer wants to know more and more about Memo. Finally he wants to meet Memo, but why?

The story expresses the hopelessness of the Mexican farmer and the lack of opportunity in their own country for those with any skills. Locked inside their own country, no longer the owner of their own resources, they are simply factory fodder for their richer neighbour to the north. We need to see more of this type of film to provide a social window into how science is affecting poorer countries. Is this the future for these countries?



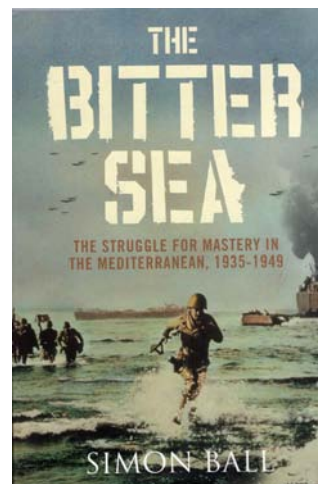
The Bitter Sea
The Struggle For Mastery In The
Mediterranean 1935 – 1949
Simon Ball
Published by Harper Collins 2009

Simon Ball has given us a comprehensive and detailed book on the war in the Mediterranean and especially he has covered the people who made the decisions and the people who fought the battles. He takes history as a result of actions and turns it into history as a result of peoples weaknesses, beliefs and prejudices.

The Mediterranean was a world thoroughfare carrying traffic through the Suez Canal to and from Europe. The big drawback of this is the choke point south of Italy. Mussolini saw the Sea as an "Italian Sea", much in the traditional manner of the old Romans, and his fleets were often in transit between Italy and the Italian colonies of northern Africa. Since most of the crossing along this sea route was covered by Italian air power or threatened by their Navy it forced a division of the British presence in the Mediterranean into East and West commands. They could not afford to relinquish either end of the Sea as their naval presence was all that kept the Italian forces and the Vichy French Navy bottled up. As the Italians made their moves in North Africa and the western Mediterranean the British and their allies found it increasingly difficult to maintain a presence. Supplies for the North African campaign were landed in Alexandria and they had to cross the Italian sector to get there or face the long trip south around Africa. The same applied to food going to Britain from Australia and New Zealand. Little by little the British Navy was whittled down as it was ordered into one desperate campaign after another.

Simon Ball examines the leaders who set these campaigns in motion. Few leaders come off well in his analysis, but some military commanders were at least competent. Kesselring had the German forces, especially the Luftwaffe, well organised and supplied. Despite setbacks the Italian navy was well lead by good men usually. Unfortunately the British, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, were largely under the command of very poor quality men except for Cunningham and all were subject to Churchill's whims and fancies back in Britain. The British were divided rather than coordinated and each segment such as the Intelligence agencies seemed reluctant to allow any intrusion on "their" turf. There were many one-man missions

such as that by Anthony Eden to try to bring the locals into line. These were notably unsuccessful because the British failed to realise just how despised they were by the local populations. The same fault occurred with the French and Italians. Many of the local leaders were just out to get what they could and settle accounts at the end of the war.



The Allies had to deal with Royalists and Republicans in Greece, the Arab Grand Mufti of Jerusalem versus the Jews, a number of factions in Egypt, Communists and Royalists in Czechoslovakia, and all the splinter groups who were just out for commercial gain or political power. The British distrusted the Vichy French and De Gaulle's Free French, the Vichy French distrusted the Italians (with whom they were still on cordial terms), and nobody really trusted the British.

The war looked settled in for a long period of attrition. On land Rommel (and Simon Ball analyses his moves carefully and shows that he was not such a great commander as history has tended to picture him) had wins and losses. On the sea the navies traded blow for blow and both sides seemed to be holding their own. The need to protect convoys put the Royal Navy in a difficult position, within range of Italian torpedo bombers. One by one their big ships were sunk. In the air the Luftwaffe had superiority except perhaps over the deserts of Africa where the balance of power depended on getting fuel through the blockades.

The Americans were urged to join the battle in North Africa, but unlike the colonial powers they carried no ill-feeling with the local people. Indeed, they made an attempt to find out what the local people wanted to do after the war. Although the polls were carried out to find out who the locals believed would win the war a high percentage wanted nothing at all to do with the Allies but wanted to determine their own future. The Americans had no colonial ambitions so just wanted to use North Africa as a stepping stone to Europe. Britain on the other hand still believed it was important to put the former Ital-

ian and Spanish colonies under British rule to protect their trade routes through the Suez Canal. No wonder then that Ball points out that the British “accepted that they were more unpopular in North Africa than the Nazis”. While Churchill was sacking his generals, Eisenhower went about doing what Rommel and the British could not – take North Africa. This would also divert public attention from the British losses and hopefully give a much-needed victory.

The bickering over who would control what continued and Ball paints a picture of the French assuming they would command the invasions of their former colonies, Britain not telling the Americans of the proposed Alamein offensive as they didn’t trust the Americans, and so on. While Montgomery was winning the battle of El Alamein Eisenhower had to deal with the petty ambitions of the French commander Giraud who loftily declared that as a Frenchman and out-ranking Eisenhower he would be the one to lead the invasion of the French colonies.

American tactics after the battle were divided. There were those urging a complete takeover of the Mediterranean along the lines of the British preference. These people thought an invasion of north western Europe would be folly. Others saw the future as taking over the eastern Mediterranean and extending their influence there – rather prophetic in view of the current oil-powered politics. The final proposal, to invade Europe from the south through Italy, had its supporters as well. In the end the Italian option turned into a debacle. Churchill, meanwhile, had his own ideas on where the forces should be concentrated next. Vichy France still remained a thorn in everyone’s side.

The breaking point for the Axis came when Sicily was invaded. With sufficient troops and materiel the Americans were able to make a strong advance. The German forces began to leave the island and the Italians were quick to follow. Even the Italian attempts to surrender Italy were marred by intrigue and counterplot as the participants tried to get as much power for their own factions as possible. For a while the Allies were unsure just who had the power to surrender on behalf of Italy.

The disgusting jockeying for power continued at the highest levels and Ball gives us an insight into the motives of the various world leaders. Roosevelt, for instance, proposed a conference of world leaders that would effectively divide the world into spheres of influence. Churchill,

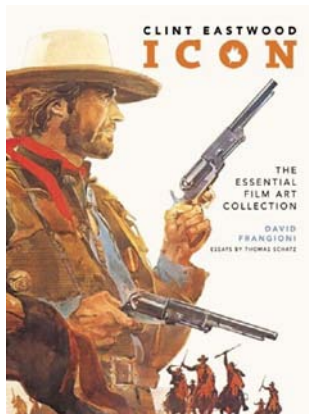
having seen the invasion of Europe given to Eisenhower, was more concerned with his own prestige and with having a British commander in charge of the Mediterranean – under his control. He wasted no time in organising an invasion at Anzio which, had it succeeded, would have cut off many German troops doing a fighting retreat up Italy. His record of military blunders preceded him and the American officer in charge of the invasion said “the whole affair has the strong odour of Gallipoli and apparently the same amateur is still on the coach’s bench”. Although the Anzio landing was unopposed Churchill’s dream of encircling the enemy troops to the south failed when the forgotten Germans to the north encircled the Allies instead. Churchill’s glorious moment once again turned into World War I trench warfare,

What was left of the Mediterranean war turned political and, Ball points out, became a training ground for later independence groups like the Haganah. The British didn’t notice this because they were too concerned with working around behind the Americans to put their own preferred Governments into countries like Greece. The outcomes of these blunders sealed Britain’s fate in the Mediterranean in following years. They got away with it because the Americans were now looking to an invasion of France. Their experience in Italy suggested that the war would be continually bogged down in battles of attrition if they insisted on fighting their way up Italy. The Mediterranean was simply unimportant to them. That left the way clear for the British, the French, the Arabs and even the Vatican to squabble over areas of power. It led to decades of unrest in places like Algeria, Greece and Palestine and ultimately to the displacement of the previous colonial powers.

Although Simon Ball has covered the major battles in some detail as well as the tactics and logistics, it is his attention to the personalities that makes this book more than just a history. By understanding the motives and background of the leaders involved it gives a wider scope to the history of this troubled area. It also helps to explain why the colonial powers did not see the arising of the independence movements. There were, it was true, those movements whose motives were mostly based on a lust for power, but there were also those whose upbringing and background led them to believe in their own superiority over the local people. It took World War II to give the local people a chance at self-determination.

**Clint Eastwood
– Icon
David Frangioni
Insight Editions 2009**

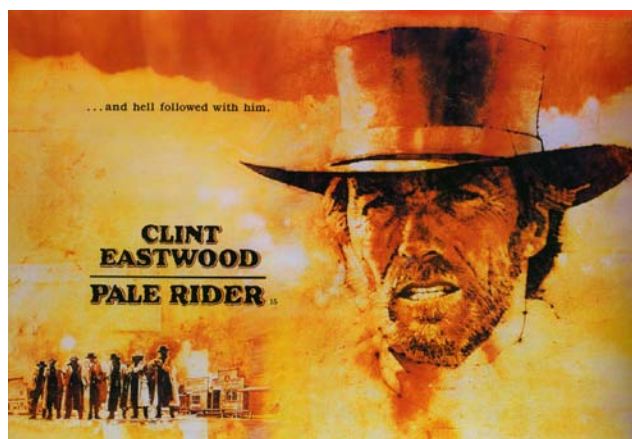
This book is not intended to be a history of Clint Eastwood's film career. The subtitle *The Essential Film Art Collection* sets its place – it is highlighting the worldwide popularity of this prolific actor and producer through the author's comprehensive collection of film posters and other memorabilia. In the process we also get a beautifully illustrated filmography.



There is something about collectors. They have a passion for their subject that carries into their writings and conversations and turns an otherwise unknown subject into something fascinating. So it is with this book. Frangioni has been collecting for a long time and he discusses the differences between poster artists, the styles preferred in different countries, and the different promotional materials used. The high quality illustrations demonstrate what he means.

Since the artwork is arranged in chronological order we get a brief history of Eastwood's films built into the book. Although I have enjoyed his films for many years, especially the "spaghetti westerns" that made his name in the western genre, the book has reminded me of many of his lesser-known films as well. The "Dirty Harry" series was popular, but I had completely forgotten his attempt at a musical in *Paint Your Wagon*. OK, it wasn't all that bad, but some films are best forgotten. His performance in the war film *Where Eagles Dare* was somewhat better

Eastwood continued his career with more out-of-



-character films like *Every Which Way But Loose* and *Escape From Alcatraz* in the 1970s. In the poster art for these, guns were for a change noticeably absent. They returned in the rather comic war film *Kelly's Heroes*, which I regarded as one of his best after *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. Somehow, though, Eastwood just couldn't get away from the Westerns.

Two Mules For Sister Sara was a really enjoyable film that seems to have been completely forgotten – until this book. The same goes for the 1971 film *The Beguiled*. The posters for both these show what had become a rather stereotyped Eastwood image – a close-up of his roughly-shaven face and the inevitable revolver held in front of him. The gun was replaced with a knife for the posters for the thriller *Play Misty For Me*. It returned for the range of westerns and thrillers that followed in the late 70s.

This continued through the 80s with unusual films like *Bronco Billy*, *Firefox* and *Bird*. Even in the 90s, though, he could still manage a high quality western like *Unforgiven*. Eastwood turned 70 in 2000 but has still continued to produce good films (apart perhaps from *Space Cowboys*). His production company Malpaso seems to be able to come up with a winner film on a modest budget at a time when the blockbusters were breaking the big Hollywood studios.

Even a quick glance through the book will bring back memories of some of those forgotten films as well as Eastwood's most successful ones. In a career of over fifty years he must have surely made at least one film that every viewer would enjoy. This book is a tribute to the man and his films.

Counter Insurgency
David Kilcullen
Scribe Publications 2010

David Kilcullen has presented here a series of essays and writings about the theory and practice of countering insurgency – non-elected groups trying to take over or destabilise an existing government by force. He quotes many examples from history and from his own experience and builds up a picture of what is an insurgent and suggests ways of countering them by non-traditional methods.

He raises an interesting point that “a Government that is losing to an insurgency isn’t being outfought, it’s being outgoverned”. People just want a quiet life and if this means tolerating insurgency they will do so in the absence of a better government. If the legitimate government bodies are corrupt, do not provide basic services or fail to provide basic justice then the insurgents may win “hearts and minds” by doing so themselves. It is interesting to compare this approach with another book recently reviewed, *The War For Ireland 1913 – 1923* edited by Peter Cottrell. During the Irish “Easter Uprising” a Nationalist group declared themselves the Provisional Government of Ireland. They were thoroughly ignored by the populace, who despite any Nationalist leanings they may have had could see no advantage in a civil war. The uprising failed. Kilcullen contrasts the situation in Afghanistan where the government has practically no presence in many provinces. Such administration as exists is corrupt, especially the police. The Taliban has moved in to exploit this and established Sharia courts that at least give the local people some redress and a dispute-solving mechanism.

Although military action is one of the counter-insurgency tools, Kilcullen points out that it may often bring collateral damage that can destroy any goodwill very quickly. It is surprising to see a military man suggesting that the military should look at non-military options, but his reasoning makes sense. An example he gives is Indonesia which during its independence faced insurgency over which model of government it should adopt. An Islamic group, Darul Islam, wanted the new country to be a fully Islamic state. They began insurgency operations. The Indonesian military countered this by a “wall of legs” technique – each night the villagers would surround their own village. Ostensibly to keep insurgents out, it also effectively locked any local insurgents in and stopped them creating mischief. It was a low-cost approach and had no

COUNTER INSURGENCY

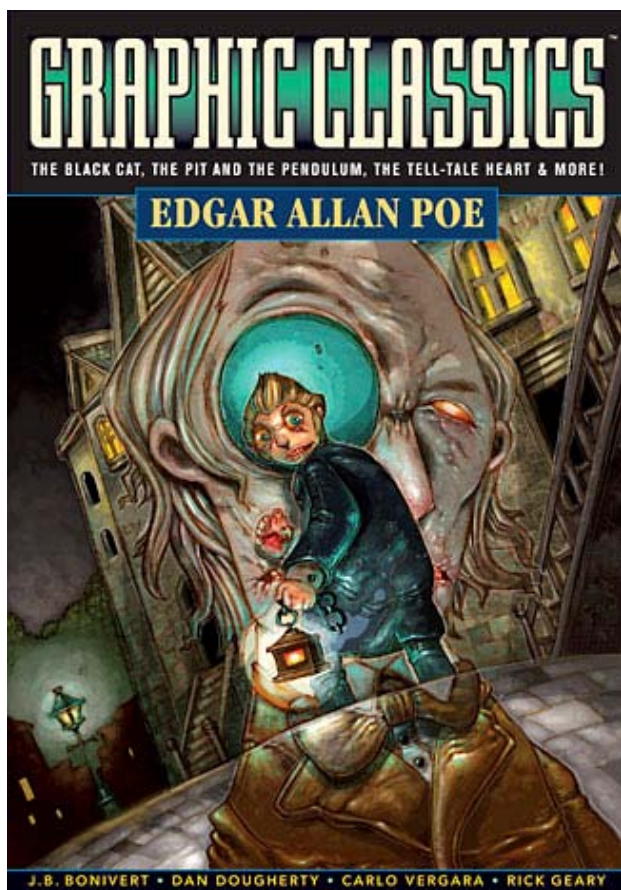
DAVID KILCULLEN



collateral damage apart from a bunch of tired farmers each morning.

Kilcullen has learned a lot from his extensive Army experience. Unlike an armchair expert he has been on the ground and seen insurgency in practice so his opinions are important. They are an interesting change from the traditional “bomb them back to the Stone Age” approach that still seems to be in favour in some areas. As he recounts some of his experiences it is easy to see how quickly a minor situation can blow up, as in the shootout between Indonesian troops and militia and Australian troops at Motaiin Bridge in East Timor. This introduced a political dimension that led to the official version of the incident being far removed from what actually happened. Kilcullen highlights the need for training to handle this sort of event. In the end it was his training and skill in the local language that helped calm down the issue.

Experience like this should not be ignored. Although Kilcullen admits he has modified his opinions in some of his writings, his experience is beyond question and his suggestions should be closely studied.



**Graphic
Classics
Edgar Allan Poe
Graphic
Classics (2010)**

Once again Graphic Classics have outdone themselves bringing classic tales of horror and the imagination up to date through the use of the graphic novel. Graphic Classics Edgar Allan Poe includes such tales as The Black Cat, The Pit and the Pendulum, The Tell-Tale Heart, The Raven, The Premature Burial and many others. This is the fourth edition of this well respected edition from Graphic Classics and includes some forty new pages.

Each tale has its own illustrator and hence presents a different take on the stories told, this offers a marvellous varied visual experience as well as the power of the original tales adapted to suit the medium.

The quality of the production cannot be faulted, it has a powerfully visual colour front and back cover and the quality of the images in each tale is amazing. I really enjoy the variation between each tale, some are told in comic book style with story bubbles, while others use graphics to enhance a more a more text based storytelling

style. Each tale comes alive in this medium and will bring the tales of Poe to a new audience. While older readers of his stories will find this a refreshing new approach, new readers will be seduced by the modern style and will discover a writer that may just excite their imaginations and encourage them to look up his works.

The book also includes details of each artist, so if you like their work you can order other Graphic Classics volumes which feature their art.

The next release from Graphic Classics is a full colour Christmas release which includes a range of dark, satirical and downright strange Christmas tales. It will be available from October 2010 onwards.

It is well worth visiting the Graphic Classics site to see the wide range of titles they have available: <http://www.graphicclassics.com/>

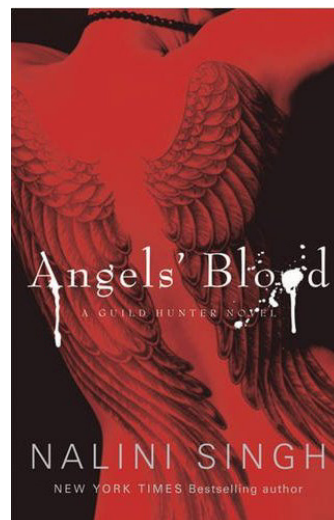
Guildhunter Series
Angel's Blood and Archangel's Kiss
Nalini Singh
Published by Hachette Australia

Reviewer: Jeremy Kong

Another series in the non-traditional urban fantasy style that is becoming so popular. In this style we see the characters being depicted as more human with human problems, and it gives a new look to old characters.

In the cities people can petition the "archangels" who run them to become vampires with all the benefits that entails – immortality, power, beauty. In return you are expected to offer yourself for a hundred years service. There are those who break the contract. The Guild Hunters are mortals who track these contract breakers down and return them for punishment. The punishments are no light thing – if you are immortal, you can have every bone in your body broken over a very long time.

Archangels are not the godly creatures of legend – they are a powerful, immortal



and utterly amoral group. After all, these are the ones who create vampires as servants.

Angel's Blood

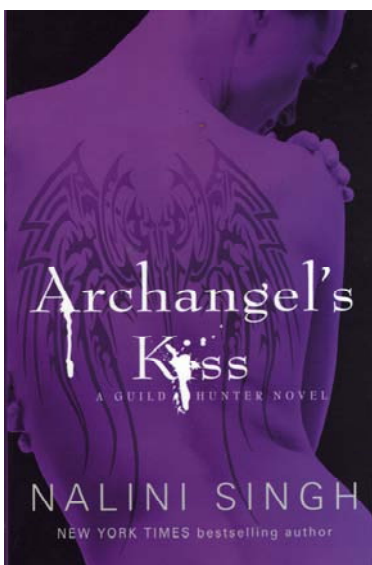
Elena Deveraux is a Guild hunter. She has acutely developed senses including a sense of smell that allows her to track vampires and it also makes for some interesting descriptions of the vampires and angels she comes into contact with.

"he smelt like sex and pain"

She is hired by an archangel Raphael to track down a rogue archangel who has gone on a savage killing rampage. She will need all her skills as a hunter and a woman to fulfil the contract. There is as much danger from the possessive Raphael, who oozes sex appeal, as from the rogue. Elena herself is pretty strong with the sex appeal.

Archangel's Kiss

Raphael, the Archangel of modern-day New York, is now Elena's lover. He has fed her ambrosia and turned her into an angel, but she needs time to adapt to her new powers. The other Archangels may not allow her that much time. There is a plot to kill her because of what she is.



There is constant intrigue between the archangels, always looking for a weakness in each other. Elena may be Raphael's weakness. To Elena it may be Raphael's arrogant assumption that love means total possession. She has enough to deal with just there, but there is a series of crimes that shake the Angles to the core.

These books are a great read when you get past all the lavish erotic descriptions of the male characters. These books would be great to give to your girlfriend or wife (or both) if you want to get a bit of action.

Lonely Werewolf Girl Martin Millar Piatkus 2009

Reviewer:
Jeremy Kong

Cross-dressing werewolves, drug-using werewolves, fashionista demonesses, Goths, werewolves with eating disorders – all these and more. Infidelity, rock n roll, drugs – it's not easy being a modern werewolf.



Kalix is the lonely werewolf girl of the title. She has been banished from her clan the MacRinnalch for attacking the Thane, the lord of the werewolf clan, who also happens to be her father. She has been on the run since then living on the streets, trying to starve herself to death (she is bulimic in her human form) while the clan hunts her down. She will, however gorge herself while in werewolf form then throw it all up when she returns to human. As the story progresses we meet more of her family.

There is Thris, a fashion designer sorceress werewolf, and her sister Malveria "the fire queen, whose extreme beauty existed somewhere between a Babylonian Death Goddess and an Asian supermodel" and is a fashion tragic.

Kalix has two brothers – one is the traditional werewolf warrior who really wants to kill Kalix for the reward, and the other is Marcus who has a penchant for women's clothing. Then there are the two cousins Delicious and Beauty, who have been kicked out of the clan for their rock n roll lifestyle of booze and drugs.

With the death of the Thane Kalix becomes aware of her powers – she was born on the full moon while her mother was in werewolf form and has tremendous powers. All she wants, though, is to be left alone but circumstances seem to keep dragging her back into the politics of the werewolf clan.

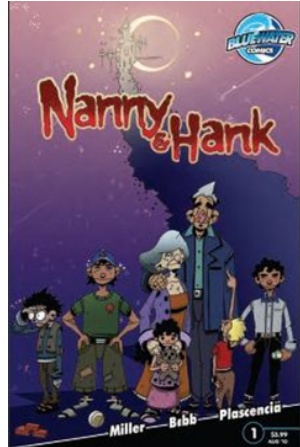
It's an understatement to say that the plot is complex. It is a massive book and you want to follow each character, as there is so much going on. The characters are well drawn with a lot of depth and they carry the plot so it grabs hold of you. Even the evil characters grow on you because of their quirks and oddities.

With Kalix the author has pinned down the typical teenage girl perfectly.

It's a three course meal of a book and will leave you satisfied.

**Nanny and Hank
#1
Bluewater
Comics**

Nanny and Hank #1 is an impressive character driven comic. It has a nicely presented design which is filled with colour, texture and style.



The characters are all drawn in their own unique ways, the vampyres seem hard and angular while the old couple and their daughter are more organic and soft. The backgrounds all create an excellent mood and the text is easy to read and follow.

I like the way it brings together two seemingly distinct storylines to create an extremely engaging tale. O'Neil is in a bar getting wasted and is upset he is not appreciated in his work. He rails against those who do not respect the hard work he does and who put style over substance. At first you have no idea what he does but hear a lot about the Council he works for and his lack of satisfaction.

It is only after a while you realize he is a vampyre recruiter and that the Council are not happy with the quality of recruits he is offering.

He gets so drunk he causes a scene at the bar and is thrown into the street. At the same time an old couple is planning a holiday. They are your average pensioner duo planning to visit their daughter and her children. They like to driven at night and Hank has just picked up the van and is racing home for dinner. He is a bit distracted and hits what he thinks is an animal, but it is actually O'Neil and boy is he pissed !

The two tales now merge together and O'Neil decides to take revenge on the old couple but also get back at the Council. While normally he would have simply killed them, he turns them and now Hanny and Hank have a very different future in front of them.

Even worse, the couple has to embark on a family vacation without alerting their children and grandchildren to the fact that they now need human blood to survive.

Nanny & Hank features the talents of writer Mark L. Miller, writer of the company's Vincent Price anthology series, and artist Steve Babb.

Blue Water Productions

Web: <http://www.bluewaterprod.com/>

**Sun Ra:
Interviews and
Essays
Editor
John Sinclair
Headpress 2010**

Sun Ra is considered one of the most eccentric and creative members of the free jazz movement. He was a composer and musician yet also a philosopher and

occultist. His work has never been collected in one place and this fascinating volumes brings together a selection of interviews, photos, comics and essays.

It is impeccably researched and offers insight into his strange mystical and occult influenced worldview and includes rare photographs and images.

From the mid 1950s until his death in 1993, Sun Ra led "The Arkestra", an ensemble with



an ever-changing line-up and name which sometimes numbered as many as thirty musicians living and playing together under the guidance, some would say despotic tutelage of Sun Ra himself. Their music touched upon the entire history of jazz, from ragtime to swing, bebop to free jazz, while the band also pioneered the use of new forms, including electronic music, space music and free improvisation.

While Sun Ra's music have created a legendary reputation, it was his strange worldview which gave him cult status. He claimed to have originated from Saturn, and evolved a mystical sci-fi philosophy which he weaved into both the music and Dadaist performances of The Arkestra, whose performances which inspired artists as diverse as George Clinton and MC5.

Wolfsangel
By M D Lachlan
Orion Books
2010

Lachlan has written a strange, dark tale of werewolves, Norse gods and magic.

Odin may be returning to earth. God of war and destruction, if he returns it will be a dark time for mankind. His favourite form on earth is that of a wolf.

The mountain witches believe they may be able to stop him with a rune called the Wolfsangel. The Rune is more than a letter, it is the embodiment of a powerful spell. Its drawback is that it can only be used by a werewolf or wolfman, someone more wolf than human.

King Authun is without an heir. If he dies his little kingdom will be thrown into civil war as the other lords fight for power. To buy time his wife is pretending to be pregnant but his time is running out. He has consulted the witches who have told him where there is a woman with a newborn son. He will raid the settlement and take the son for his own.

The witches did not look deeply enough. The woman has had twin boys. They are the sons of a wolfman who was passing the settlement and

found her sleeping in the open one night. Authun takes one boy as his own and leaves the other with a family far up in the mountains. One day the boy is taken further into the mountains by his temporary parents and abandoned to his fate. This would usually involve a quick death in the teeth of wolves.

His wolfman father has left him a legacy – a small talisman, just a pebble really, with a rune scratched into it that identifies the boy as the kin of a wolfman. Rather than kill him the wolves bring him up as one of their own. Eventually following the death of the alpha male he becomes the leader of the wolf clan. The old male warned him about the dangers of eating human flesh and so far he has avoided it, but the other members of the pack will eat humans if there is no other food available

Years pass and Authun's son is something of a disappointment. He is not by nature a fighter and doesn't take part in the raids that are so popular among the other Vikings. Finally it reaches the point where he must prove himself a man or step aside. He swears that he will travel to the north of the kingdom and bring back the wolfman who is terrorising the area and killing the occasional merchants who pass through.

The two meet and the wolfman is captured and brought back.

In the background the politics of the area are in flux. The two unknowing brothers are thrown closer together in a series of adventures and treachery and gradually the wolfman learns human values including love, while his brother learns some of the wild ways of the wolf. They are both in love with the same woman and there will be a showdown over this, but first they must regain the kingdom. There is also the lurking problem of Odin's return. One brother with both human and wolf powers may be able to use the power of the Wolfsangel rune, but what if that power is divided between two of them?

Lachlan has a tight writing style that keeps the action moving but somewhere he manages to fit in some excellent characterisation and a good view of the cultures. These make his story so credible and tie together the different strands of the book.



A Single Man
Icon Home Entertainment
R4 DVD

A Single Man is based on the novel by Christopher Isherwood of the same name and the screenplay is by Tom Ford, Tom Ford is also the director. Ford is a leading fashion designer celebrated for his designs of luxury clothing, accessories, fragrance and cosmetics and so it is quite a surprise to find a film that is so emotionally powerful and revealing. It is beautiful with an incredible sense of style and mood, even more amazing when you consider this is Ford's directorial debut. It is also marked by a stellar score and amazing performances.

When you consider Ford's rather outré persona it is a surprise to find such a carefully crafted even reserved film; there is no sex, incidental nudity and no violence. In many ways while it is a film featuring a major gay theme, it is not a "gay" film; it is a film about loss, life and living in the moment.

Set in 1962 the film centres on George Falconer a professor of English literature at a Los Angeles college. George is finding it difficult to make it through each day. His lover of sixteen years died in a car accident some eight months before. Due to the nature of the times George only came to know about the accident from a "friend in the family" since Jim's family had not time for their relationship. He could not attend the funeral, grieve or share his loss with anyone he knew except Charley, an old female friend. George has reached the stage that he has made a decision to commit suicide that evening. He has prepared his home for the occasion, booked a dinner with Charley and organized his affairs. As



Colin Firth as Tom Ford

he goes through the day, he begins to look at life in a new way since he knows his death is near.

As he meets various people he communicates more honestly, hints about his sexual orientation in a class at the college and tries to savour every last moment. When Kenny Potter, one of his students seems to be interested in meeting him for a drink he takes the opportunity. As they connect George tries to communicate his experiences of life to Kenny and after they go for a swim George achieves a deeper understanding of himself.

This is an unusual film, filled with beautiful images, a superior use of colour, tone and texture and uses subtle changes in imagery to create mood. The acting is absolutely superb, Colin Firth is utterly convincing but then so are all involved. There are so many themes explored in *Single Man* from gay life in the Sixties to finding meaning in a secular world. At the same time it is a new form of "gay" film in that it avoids the clichés about gay bar life, partying and sex; instead it focuses on the experience of male-male affection in a way that I do not think any film has handled before.

One of the more interesting themes is the isolation of gay people in a world which does not understand them. Of course the world has moved on a lot since the Sixties and gay people are more visible and tolerance is the name of the game. But tolerance is not acceptance and in many ways the film reminds how far we have to go before gay lives are celebrated and truly treated as equal to their heterosexual equivalents. While it may be fine to be "out" at work, how many gay people can actually discuss their partners and their lives in the same way as their straight work mates? While gay people may be more public and visible, there is always a reserve (a mask) that must be worn to survive in the "straight world". *Single Man* is a thought provoking and moving film which is a significant work of modern cinema.



Ford and Charley

Clash of the Titans Combo Pack Warner Brothers R4 DVD

Clash of the Titans is available in an impressive Combo Pack which includes the Blu Ray with loads of extras and an alternate ending, the DVD and a digital copy for those who watch the film on the move. It is an impressively done new version of the original classic which I think surpasses the original film in almost every way. While the original film used the latest special effects stop motion animation available in 1981 it is a film which really demands a high level of film technique which means that it really hasn't shown its full potential until this latest version. The first thing you immediately notice about 2010 film is its amazing special effects and its mega budget. It really looks incredible and everything from the hurricane which surrounds Hades to the Kraken grab your attention. At the same time the character profile has changed, Perseus has changed from the slightly effete Harry Hamlin to the super macho Sam Worthington. While this is quite a successful development Worthington's Aussie accent is a bit disconcerting when compared to the other actors.

There are also lots of intriguing background characters such as the fanatic who demands the mob sacrifices Andromeda to the impressive depiction of the clash between Zeus and Hades.

While today's taste in cinema doesn't usually include films with a mythological orientation, this is truly a ripper. A fantasy for adults filled with romance, horror, action, lots of battles and special effects which are seamlessly integrated.



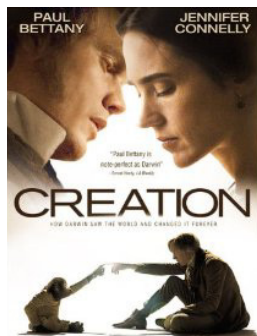
The Blu Ray edition is especially impressive with incredibly crisp detail and textures jumping off the screen.

Clash of the Titans is set in the Greek city of Argos, where man has decided to disobey the gods and destroy a statue of Zeus. We are introduced to three Olympians who battled the Titans long ago: the brothers Zeus (Liam Neeson), Poseidon (Danny Huston), and Hades (Ralph Fiennes). While Zeus is undecided about what to do about the humans, Hades believes that only punishment and fear will solve the problem. Zeus decides to allow Hades to have his way.

A fishmeal, Spyros (Pete Postlethwaite) finds a coffin adrift in the sea inside is a dead mother and a baby, Perseus. Perseus is brought up as their own child, but when this family is killed when Argos declares war on the gods, Perseus is left to fend for himself. Soon he realizes he is a demi-god, a son of Zeus and he must somehow find a way to defend Argos against the fury of the Gods. The tale becomes even more complicated as soon we learn that Hades himself is planning to overthrow Zeus to become the lord of Olympus.



Creation
The True Story of
Charles Darwin
 Lionsgate
 R1 DVD



Creation is a moving biopic on the life and work of Charles Darwin. It combines a deep and insightful exploration of his inner turmoil over the ramifications of his discovery of the theory of evolution and its mechanism in natural selection and his publication of his theories in *The Origin of Species*. The film is directed by Jon Amiel who made *The Singing Detective* and *Entrapment* with writer John Collee of *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* fame. It was produced by Jeremy Thomas (*The Last Emperor*, *Sexy Beast*) at Recorded Picture Company with BBC Films and Ocean Pictures. It is based on Annie's Box a biography penned by Darwin's great-great-grandson Randal Keynes using personal letters and diaries of the Darwin family. The film is unusual in that it combines science, a love story and a powerful psychological melodrama. It is well researched and based solidly on facts, historical and scientific.

Paul Bettany (*A Beautiful Mind*, *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*) plays Charles Darwin, Jennifer Connelly (*A Beautiful Mind*, *Requiem for a Dream*) plays his religious wife, all offer superb performances as do the supporting cast including their children.

The film is insightful as it explores the great suffering Darwin went through to produce his work. While committed to his wife and local community, he realizes that the facts of science directly contradict their simple religious beliefs and slowly loses his faith. His suffering is exacerbated by the death of his daughter Annie and later



his baby son Charley. Darwin's study of evolutionary theory brings him to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that having married his first cousin endowed his children with certain weaknesses and this led to their death. His guilt is palpable and shown with raw intensity. Looking back from 2010 we can clearly see that the primitiveness of the medical care of the period, both mainstream and alternative (such as hydrotherapy) was the main cause of their deaths, but Darwin cannot escape the feeling of guilt and self-condemnation.

The conflicts between Darwin, his wife and the local pastor are beautifully rendered on screen, you can feel with Darwin as he is tormented by the facts he knows as true in contradiction to the superstitions of those around him.

In many ways this guilt is a reflection of his fear of the shockwave his work will have on the larger society. The period was one of conflict between religion and science and Darwin's meticulously researched work would, in the words of Huxley, finally kill off god! It is certainly a controversial film, one which had problems getting distribution in the United States. It honestly, if not brazenly, discusses the way in which the theory of evolution removes the need for a creator god. It also offers some superb scenes of nature in all its beauty and cruelty.

One of the most moving scenes juxtapositions the death of Jenny the chimpanzee with that of his daughter Annie, it is a moving and immensely sad but reminds us of our connection to the great ape family and indeed to all animals. While controversial for those of a religious persuasion, I found the scene beautiful and emotionally intense.

This is an amazing film, filled with intelligence, emotion and beauty. It is thought provoking and stimulating. The acting is superb and the cinematography excellent. It really is an amazing experience.

Fighter
Hopscotch
Entertainment
R4 DVD

English subtitles

It has taken me a while to get around to viewing this film. It turned out to be quite a gem with good acting, brilliant fight sequences and an intelligent plot involving cross-cultural conflicts.

Aicha (Semra Turan) is the daughter of a Muslim family in Denmark. Her father, used to being the dominant one in the family, is not doing so well in a non-Muslim country with different cultural values. He is stuck in a deadend job and resents it. He may have a way out, though. Aicha's brother is to marry a girl from another good Muslim family and the girl's father has promised him a job driving taxis after the wedding. This will be a step up for him so the whole family wants to see it go ahead.

Aicha is, according to her father's wishes, supposed to be preparing to go to medical school so she can follow her brother and become a doctor. She is not overly impressed with school-work and her school grades are lacklustre. Her only passion is Kung Fu. The school has a small training club, but even there Aicha is in trouble. Her uncontrolled temper leads to her being booted out of the school team but her instructor, sensing Aicha's ability, refers her to another training club where the sport is taught at a higher level.

The new club is mixed – men and girls – and her father will not stand for this so she is banned from Kung Fu. She continues to attend, though, and starts to form an affection for Emil,



a non-Muslim boy in her group who helps her to train. This would really anger her father if he knew. It is completely against his Muslim traditions and he would regard her as a slut. Emil himself is confused about dating a Muslim girl so the relationship develops slowly. Another boy in a class at the training school, Omar, is a Muslim and when ordered to he will not train against Aicha – it is beneath his dignity as a Muslim to fight a girl.

Matters come to a head at the engagement party for her brother and her prospective sister-in-law. Aicha and Omar are involved in a fight and she gets the blame. For bringing shame on her father's family (it is always the girl who is at fault) the engagement is broken off and her father's new job will not go ahead. She runs away from home and stays with one of the other girl Kung Fu trainees. There is only one thing left in her life – the upcoming Kung Fu championship.

Her brother, however, has got his girlfriend pregnant and he is getting a savage beating from her male relatives when Aicha goes to visit him. Her Kung Fu skills stop the beating abruptly and she counsels her brother to see his girlfriend's father, apologise, and try to get the engagement going again.

On the day of the Championships her first priority is to do well. She must fight her way to the top, and along the way she must fight Emil and then Omar. Then she must decide on her future, try to reunite with her family, and try to rebuild her life to fit into both cultures. And what of her future with Emil?

It is sad that many people cannot reconcile their culture with the culture of their new country. It will usually be the young that suffer the worst, but I also felt some sympathy for Aicha's father trapped at the bottom of a new culture that he could not adapt to.



Gran Torino
Roadshow Pictures
R4 DVD

Elsewhere in this issue we look at a book of poster art for Clint Eastwood's many films. Even in his recent years he can still act in and produce a good film. I thought we might have a look at some of his later films and see how they compare with his earlier work. Especially in his early spaghetti western days, characterisation was usually minimal. The "Man With No Name" was also a man with no personality. Action was the thing. In his later films Eastwood has often played down the action in favour of more developed characterisation and this film is a good example. Some actors seem to be able to do this – as they get older they just get better. I am reminded for instance of John Wayne's skilful depiction of an aging gunfighter in the film *The Shootist*. *Gran Torino* has a lot in common.

Walt Kowalski is a retired Ford production line worker. He has just buried his wife. His neighbourhood is being populated by Asian refugees, particularly from the Hmong hill people of Vietnam. Walt is more than a little xenophobic, but at least he is impartial about it – he dislikes all foreigners equally. He also doesn't like the kids of today (including his own), the gangs that are now infesting his suburb, religion and priests, and pretty much anything that has changed since the 1960s. The only remaining things he loves are his old dog and his Ford Gran Torino, one of the cars he built while he worked on the production line.

His prejudices are stirred up when a Hmong family moves into the house next door on the day of his wife's funeral. The extended family are a happy bunch with one exception. Young Thao, the son, is immature, has no girlfriend or



job, and probably no future. He is being pressured to join a Hmong gang run by his cousin. As part of Thao's initiation into the gang he is given the job of stealing Walt's Gran Torino. He makes a complete botch of it. His family makes him work for Walt until the debt of honour is paid off.

Thao is set to work not on Walt's house but on his neighbours' homes. The rundown suburb is slowly improved by Thao's work and he starts to learn the home repair trade under Walt's tuition. Grudgingly Walt comes to respect the young man and Thao comes to respect him as a father figure. Walt's ultimate accolade is to let Thao wash his prized car.

Thao's sister Sue is accosted by a gang one day and Walt saves her from being raped. He is now willingly taken into the Hmong community as a friend and even comes to respect them and their customs as Sue explains them to him. He finds that he particularly likes their food (he seems to live on beef jerky) so they regularly deliver meals to him. There is a lovely scene where he gets into a spitting competition with the grandmother.

He even tries to find Thao a job with a friend in





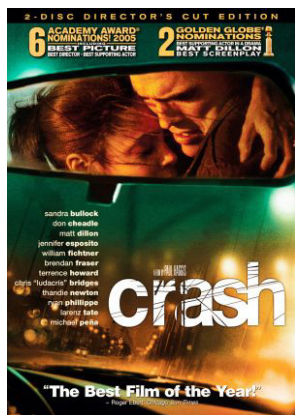
the construction industry. He can see that without a job Thao doesn't stand a chance in the increasingly violent neighbourhood. As Sue explains, "Hmong girls go to college, Hmong boys go to jail". Then Sue is kidnapped and raped and Thao is beaten up by a gang. Walt has military experience from the Korean War and has a number of guns. Thao is all for vengeance. Walt urges caution, but makes his plans. The end is totally unexpected.

It is hard to describe the skill with which Eastwood plays a man whose prejudices are changing around him. I think it may be his best part yet, and will be hard to beat in the future. Bee Vang as Thao plays almost the same role in reverse – the young lad looking for guidance in a foreign environment. It is a superb film of prejudices and intercultural conflicts.

Crash
BluRay edition 2010
Lionsgate
Entertainment
Icon
Australian Release

Crash is a powerful film about racial prejudice as seen through the eyes of a number of people in Los Angeles. Some are victims; some are in a position of sufficient power to exercise their prejudices on others. Even those at the bottom of the heap need someone to feel superior to, so we have the young Negro carjacker holding forth angrily about the white people who suppress him, but he is superior to them when he has a gun.

There is the white police officer who treats black suspects with the utmost prejudice and enjoys humiliating them – but his elderly father is at the bottom of the health system and can't get treatment for a crippling urinary tract infection. The Iraqi store owner who buys a gun to give himself some power is out to shoot the black locksmith



who changed his lock but warned him that the door wasn't up the job – will he commit murder to regain his sense of manhood? Even the black District Attorney, at the height of his profession, has his own prejudices.

These people and many others have their lives intertwined through a series of events. Some come out of it stronger, some will not survive. There is a bit of good in each one but it is submerged in the stereotype prejudice and it will take a major trauma in each life to give their good side a chance to emerge. Meanwhile the consequences of their racism is only getting them deeper into a prejudice of their own making.

The acting is superb, as you would expect from the likes of Don Cheadle or Sandra Bullock or Matt Dillon. The plot doesn't give them a lot to work with but each still manages to put a bit of life into their characters. Director Paul Haggis has broken away from the almost-universal dark and gloomy look of such films to give us daytime shots and richly-lit interiors. Apparently the sun does sometimes shine in L.A.

The film won a number of Academy Awards including Best Picture, and I think the awards were honestly earned. The film may not be everyone's style of entertainment but I enjoyed it.



From Paris with Love Sony Pictures R4 DVD

Director Luc Besson has come up with one of the best action movies I have seen in a long time. Not only that, he has extracted a really good performance from John Travolta, an actor who was looking like a bit of a has-been. Besson's approach to this film seems to have been that it's an action movie, so let's just keep up the action until the end. The boots'n'all approach works and the film is more in the older style that seems to be out of favour now in the U.S. Besson doesn't worry about too much violence – it simply is a part of the plot.

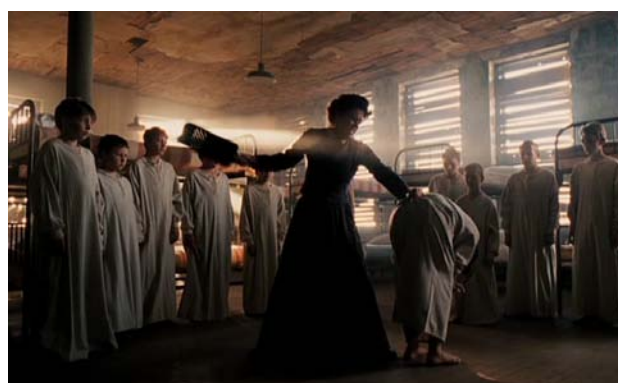
James Reese (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) is an advisor to the U.S Ambassador in Paris and he also does some low level jobs for the CIA like planting bugs. He longs to get more involved in field work and his chance comes when he is detailed to partner heavyweight operative Charlie Wax (Travolta). Wax is brash, overbearing and very, very good at his job – which seems to be killing people. Together they rack up the kills and explosions, working their way initially through a major drug cartel and then on to a Pakistani terrorist cell. Charlie is rather proud that he is averaging one kill an hour so far.

The matter now becomes far more personal for James when he finds that his fiancée may be involved with the terrorists. Is he tough enough to handle the job, even with Charlie behind him?

Although most of the characters are played seriously Travolta's performance contains many little touches of humour that stop the film from becoming too dark. It is a well-made, well balanced film all round.

The Gray Man Peacock Films R4 DVD

Albert Fish was probably America's first serial killer of the 20th century. He preyed on children and sometimes ate them. This film gives an idea of what an evil twisted person he was and the hunt to track him down.



We start with a scene in an orphanage where a young Albert is sadistically beaten while being told what an evil child he is. It must have made a major impression on his psyche because self-flagellation became a "hobby" later in his life. He is also depicted in the film as having a personal ghost, a version of his younger self, who says nothing but reminds him constantly of those earlier days.

Now he is an elderly man. His wife left him years ago and he brought up his family by himself. He has a nasty habit. He keeps trying to pick up children but when their parents refuse to let him take them to the movies or whatever excuse he has dreamed up he turns vicious and writes the parents the most filthy and vitriolic letters. One son and a daughter are aware of this. The son knows there is something really strange about his father but the daughter will hear nothing against him.

As the story starts to move Albert has just been evicted from another rented room after writing his landlady one of his letters – she wouldn't let him take her son to the movies. A Boy Scout is found slaughtered and with pieces of his flesh missing. The case is given to Homicide. A new detective, Will King, has just joined the Missing Persons department and takes an interest in the case. He is trained in the new techniques of handwriting analysis and fingerprinting so the head of the Department gives him a chance in spite of King's previous record of never really finishing anything he started. King's successes have gradually earn him the respect of the rest of Missing Persons.

Fish has befriended a family, the Budds, with a promise of jobs for their boys. He has also befriended their young daughter Grace and one day he invites Grace to accompany him to his niece's birthday party.

Grace is never seen again and Missing Persons is called in. Unfortunately Mrs Budd reveals



somewhat in the publicity and twice identifies "Mr Howard" incorrectly. The Police must arrest each suspect he has named but her wrong identifications is giving them a bad name. The case languishes for four years. Detective King, who has become obsessed with the case, suffers a minor breakdown. While he is in hospital he is reviewing the files on the case.

Fish cannot break his old habits and he sends a gloating letter to the Budds describing what he did to their daughter. Mrs Budd has had a habit of opening all the mail even though she can't read, but in the process destroying any useful fingerprints. This time her son grabs the letter in time and takes it to Detective King. It could be the breakthrough he is looking for.

From here the case becomes one of dogged detective work. Tracking down Fish is not easy. He moves around a lot and is so ordinary he doesn't stand out in a crowd, but the Police must find him before there is another disappearance.

Patrick Bauchau plays Fish perfectly. His gentle manners, his tortured flagellation, even his attempts at convincing his doting daughter that he is innocent are well portrayed.

The period look of the film is well done. It has been compared to Hannibal Lecter but they have nothing much in common - Fish was simply a totally deranged man who lived a quiet life but harboured some really strange and evil personality twists.

The film doesn't include much of the blood and gore that could so easily have slipped in. It is simply a good detective story about a dreadful man.

**High Plains Drifter
The Malpaso
Company
Universal Pictures
R4 DVD**

Although this film goes back to 1972 it highlights Eastwood's love of the Western genre and shows the influence of his "spaghetti western" days. "There have always been westerns and there will always be westerns". This is not a traditional U.S. western in the old Gary Cooper style, with everyone spotlessly



turned out and the action carefully sanitised. It is dark, dirty and violent. The hero is also not heroic in the traditional sense – he is instead a man driven by revenge.

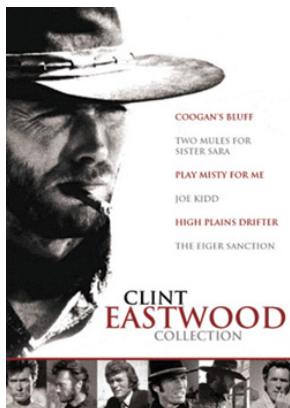
The town of Lago is owned by the Lago Mining Company. It has had to hire gunmen to protect its property and sometimes these men have gone over the top with their violent behaviour, as on the night when they bullwhipped the town's young marshal to death. The entire town stood by and watched as he was cut down in front of them. No one lifted a finger to help. But the marshal didn't die. He was left for dead somewhere but now he's back, unrecognised and nameless. The town will pay for their apathy as he humiliates them one by one.

There is a further problem. The three gunmen who bullwhipped him are out of prison and have sworn their own vengeance on the town. The town must now hire the nameless man to defend them. Will he defend them or does he have another motive?

The revenge motive is not uncommon in westerns, but it is usually on the part of the "baddie". In this film it is hard to assign good or bad roles to most of the characters and in this the film is at sharp contrast with the conventional westerns. Despite its age I think this is one of Eastwood's better westerns.

Six of Eastwood's later films are available in a compilation set from Universal called *The Clint Eastwood Collection*.

The films are *Coogan's Bluff*, *Two Mules for Sister Sara*, *Play Misty For Me*, *Joe Kidd*, *High Plains Drifter* and *The Eiger Sanction*. The set is a good representative sample of the later work from this fine actor.

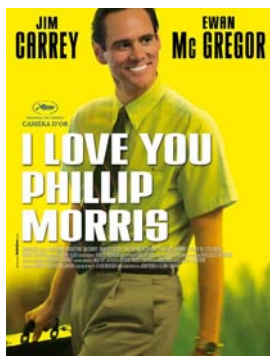


I Love You Phillip Morris
Film Review
Cinema Release
DVD Date unknown

Jim Carrey, celebrated for his unusual comedy roles and exuberant personality has taken on some more challenging characters of late. In this quite powerful celebration of "outsider" love he portrays Steven Russell, a fraudster and con man who makes his living through manipulation and flim-flam. He lives a double life as a policemen then a vegetable salesman with a devoted Christian wife and kids. After a car accident coming from an illicit affair with a gay lover, he experiences some sort of epiphany. He comes out to his wife and those around him and finding himself a young lover, adopts two dogs and starts living it up.

He soon finds that it is hard to finance a high intensity lifestyle with a nine to five job and soon gets back to his own tricks but on a much bigger scale. When he is caught and sent to jail he meets Phillip Morris, an innocent younger gay man played by Ewan McGregor. They soon fall in love and Russell will do anything to keep them together. After all sorts of prison fiascos they finally make it to the outside world but once again Russell can't simply live the average life. He is absorbed in Morris and must create a world for them which include absolutely everything they could possibly dream of, this leads to the biggest con-game of all involving millions of dollars.

Russell is a true outsider, it is not simply his love for Morris that motivates him but his contempt for the prejudice and bigotry of the world around him. He truly despises the stupidity of the world around him and has utter contempt for



those who cannot think for themselves. His crimes are as much about humiliating those who are foolish and stupid as for love. He does not hurt anyone, there is no violence in his methods, he targets authorities and large businesses and takes them for a ride.

Based on a real tale this is truly an amazing tale. The way in which he fakes his own illness and then death to escape from prison and returns to try and get his lover out of jail is breathtaking. Sadly, since the state of Texas was embarrassed by his constant escapes he was given a 144 year jail sentence. He continues to be in jail to this day. Considering that none of his crimes involved any violence it certainly seems a harsh and brutal punishment.

The film is from writer-directors Glenn Ficarra and John Requa who wrote Bad Santa. It is a powerful and moving film exploring the length to which someone will go to feel wanted and loved and who develops such a contempt for the society at large that he feels the need to exploit it to achieve the lifestyle he feels he deserves. Russell is superbly played by Carrey, he is sad and vulnerable, manipulative and cunning, and he is filled with contempt, anger and fury yet also with immense love and compassion. Ewan McGregor as Morris is beautifully innocent and while some may find the sex scenes confronting personally I did not find them especially explicit. This is a film which has a powerful emotional honesty, the ruckus about it in the American media including difficulties getting distribution on the U.S film circuit says more about their inability to deal with the open portrayal of an intense gay love affair on scene than anything else.



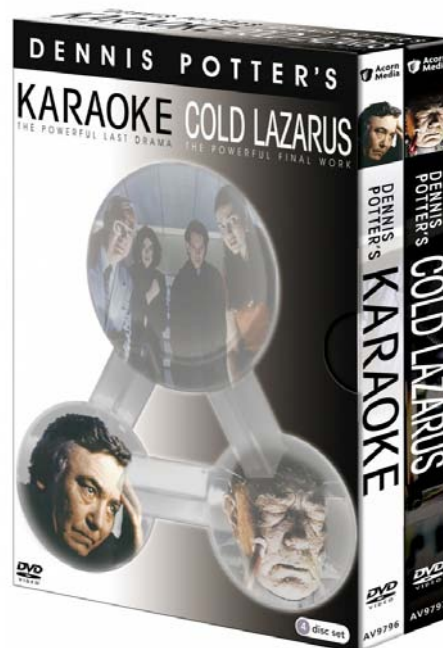
Dennis Potter's Karaoke & Lazarus
4-part TV Series
Acorn Media
R2 DVD
4 Disc Boxed Set

Daniel Freed is a successful author. His speciality is writing TV scripts, but now he is troubled – he keeps hearing other people using the words of his latest script, “Karaoke”. The film has not been publicly shown yet but characters and phrases keep popping up in the conversations of ordinary people. It is as if he has written a script that is now taking on a life of its own in the real world. His script deals mainly with the relationship between a girl named Sandra, her boyfriend and an underworld type Arthur Maillion.

These characters from his script now seem to exist in real life, particularly the dangerous thug and seedy club owner “Pig” Maillion. The line between reality and his script seems to be increasingly blurred. The script seems to have a life of its own and the real people are commenting that someone seems to be putting words in their mouth.

Daniel also has major health problems developing, from a life of hard drinking and smoking, and he has been told he only has a couple of months to live. He has become attached to Sandy, a girl he knows mainly from his script but who also now seems to exist in reality. Sandy works for Maillion and is deathly afraid of him after what he did to her mother.

Can Daniel change his script to reflect this new reality and give it a happy ending? It has already been filmed and would seem to be locked in, but can the editors recut the film to reflect Daniel's changes (if he can change anything?).



Dennis Potter was a prolific author and writer of screenplays. It has been noted that much of his work alludes to problems in his own life, such as illness and sexual abuse. When he wrote Karaoke and Cold Lazarus it was a condition that the shows be jointly produced by the BBC and their rival Channel 4. They followed his wishes in this but the reluctant collaboration has made the posthumous rights rather troubled. With these sets it looks like the matter has finally been sorted out.

It must be said that the strength of the actors carries what could otherwise be a rather confused plot. Albert Finney plays Daniel in both series, giving wonderful characterisations of Daniel becoming cranky and offensive as his illness progresses, the cold calculating Daniel



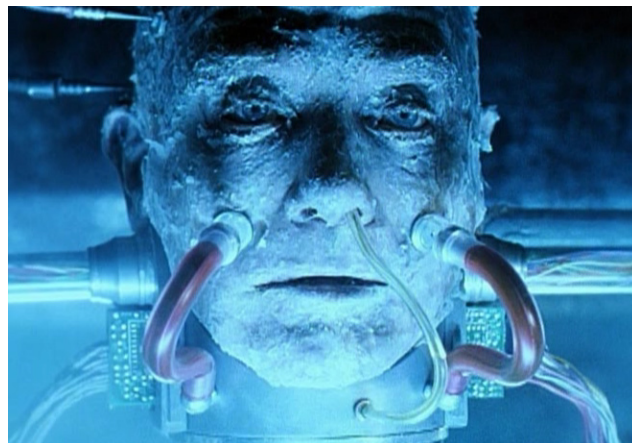
who realises he is dying and there are things to be done, and in the retro scenes of Cold Lazarus when we see other events that shaped Daniel's life. Another actor worth noting is Roy Hudd, who plays Daniel's long-suffering agent. His gentle sympathy is a refreshing contrast with the irascible Daniel. By contrast, Hywell Bennett, whom I haven't seen in anything for years, gives a powerful performance as the aptly-named "Pig".

Dennis Potter's Cold Lazarus

Cold Lazarus follows on from Dennis Potter's Karaoke, but at a distance of nearly four hundred years. Daniel Freed has died long ago but had his head cryogenically preserved. His last words before he died were "No biography".

The world is now a much different place. Countries have disappeared and the world is ruled by large corporations. Profit is their only motive and anything natural, such as cigarettes, has been made extinct or illegal and replaced by virtual reality equivalents. For the ordinary people life is dreary in the decaying cities. There is resistance, typified by a group called RON (Reality or Nothing) who are actively attacking the wealthy minority. These wealthy ones must guard their homes and apartments with armed guards.

A small laboratory in a multinational's complex in what was once England has inherited the last remaining frozen heads and is working on unlocking the memories stored in the brains. Their motives are altruistic, to let people experience the reality of life four hundred and seventy years ago. They are using chemical combinations to stimulate various areas of the brain and are finally achieving some success with Daniel's brain. At first the memories are innocuous, such as a football game, but soon they stumble across dark areas that Daniel has successfully



hidden for years – he was raped as a youngster, may have been involved in an atrocity while in the army, and murdered "Pig" Maillion near the end of his life. The combination of drugs is slowly making Daniel self-aware – not alive, but able to suffer tremendous mental anguish as his suppressed memories are brought back to the surface and inspected by strangers. The medical team is quite unaware of what they are doing to him.

The team has its own problems. The multinational's owner is ready to shut them down as they continually go over budget and their work doesn't seem to be going anywhere profitable. A media magnate, however, is well aware of their work and can see huge amounts of money to be made if he can gain control of it and the head. He is particularly interested in Daniel's sexual memories as these are what will sell to people with Virtual Reality helmets. To further complicate things one of the team is a member of RON and another is an internal spy for the multinational. RON's interest is that if they can make people aware of what life was like they may be able to convince people to revolt against the present system and go back to a better past. And all the while Daniel is becoming more aware of what is being done to him.

The story exudes a feeling of hopelessness. Like Daniel, no individual seems to be in a position to do anything by themselves to improve affairs. There seems little opportunity of saving society, just as Daniel has little chance of ending his torture before he is driven into madness,

The effects and settings are a little unsatisfactory, with that slightly seventies look that detracts a little from the series. Many of the characters are stereotypes. In spite of these minor problems Cold Lazarus is still a powerful story with an intelligent plot.



La Femme Nikita
Madman
R4 DVD and
Region B Blu Ray

French with English subtitles

Not far into this film realised had seen it before as a U.S. film called *The Assassin*. It starred Bridget Fonda in a not-very-convincing performance.

The memory nearly made me turn this film off, but I'm glad I didn't. Quite simply, Luc Besson's original (it predates *Assassin* by three years) is so much stronger and well played than the American copy.

Nikita is a teenage junkie. In a botched robbery she shoots a policeman and is sentenced to death. The Government has other uses for her, though, and she wakes up in a training complex. She has a choice – train as an assassin or die again, this time permanently.

She is not by nature an obedient trainee and a number of times she is in danger of being terminated, but under the guidance of her tutor, Bob, she gradually becomes aware of what she could become with discipline and training. Bob is more than a little in love with her and she feels affection for him.

She passes her first test exercise and is put on the active list. In between the occasional assignment she manages to become friendly with a young checkout operator, Marco, in a local su-



permarket. He has dreams of becoming a boat builder. Affection turns to love but he is still puzzled by her regular disappearances and lack of family, friends or a past. One night he meets Bob who invents a sort of past for Nikita, but is he really fooled?

Then a job goes drastically wrong. What was supposed to be a quiet safecracking exercise turns into an orgy of shooting, car crashes and bodies. The organization will not stand for this and she is marked for death. Can Bob save her?

If the American version had unimpressive acting, the French original has it all – convincing characters who are developed through the story, a plot that is fast-paced but does not let the action overwhelm the story, and first-class acting by all concerned. Anne Parillaud as Nikita is just brilliant.

Somehow the French version has a life to it that is not overcome by high-tech gadgets or undue dwelling on the techniques of assassination. The film has also been adapted into a Canadian TV series that ran for four and a half seasons. Sometimes the original is best.



**The Martian
Chronicles**
1980
Science Fiction
TV series
Icon Film Distribution
R4 DVD



Ray Bradbury's 1950 collection of short stories has become one of the great science fiction classics. Although it is now showing its age, we must remember it was a product of its times – World War II was barely over, the threat of another war, this time nuclear, was looming, and the end of the world was a definite possibility. People were looking for some sort of hope for the future and there was a role for SF to play. Bradbury's stories were set not too far into the future, starting around the 1970s, and perhaps offered a little hope that this time humans could get it right, if only on a new planet.

The stories as they developed had a lot in common with the exploration of the American West so they sat comfortably with people. Bradbury didn't gloss over some of the less antisocial events of the West, such as the extermination of the native populations by disease or the cancer of exploitative mining on the face of the planet, but he balanced these with human stories of the early pioneers of Mars. Some were rough and ready, some were interested in the history of the first Martians. As the number of immigrants increased so did the ones with antisocial habits, but they were mainly confined to the small towns.

The TV series opens with the first manned flight to Mars. They were expecting a dead planet but Mars had its population, living a low-impact life, and they were telepathic. They saw the coming of the men from Earth as a threat and one jeal-



ous husband, annoyed by his wife's telepathic dreams of a tall foreigner, destroys the first expedition. Another follows but this time the Martians are better prepared. With their telepathic powers they lull the expedition into a trance where the members believe they are reliving the pleasant times of their life. They are then humanely put down.

The third expedition arrives expecting trouble but it comes on them from an unexpected source – from one of their own crew. Crewman Spender is something of an early greenie and sees in the Martian artefacts a chance to get to know what the Martians were like and how their civilisation functioned. Crewman Briggs gives nothing for this – he is the uncouth drinking despoiling redneck that Spender despises. After a visit to a Martian "city" Spender turns on his fellow crew members and tries to kill them. Or is it Spender's mind under a Martian influence?

Inevitably the settlers arrive, nervous at the deteriorating situation back on Earth. Some adapt to Mars, some try to adapt Mars to themselves. One such group are two priests who are sent to provide for the moral needs of the settlers. Father Peregrine is, however, nursing two problems. He can only be described as a devout looney and when they meet some of the surviving Martians who manifest themselves as glowing balls of light he feels he can convert them. When this fails he seems quite ready to abandon all he was taught and worship the Martians instead. His other problem is a deep desire to meet Jesus personally. When a young Martian is accidentally brought into the town the force of Peregrine's wishes turn the telepathic Martian into a tortured, bleeding Jesus and the Father seems unwilling to let him go in spite of the Martian's suffering.

Finally the situation on Earth reaches the point where the settlement is evacuated back to



Earth just in time to be blown up by the very war they came to Mars to avoid. A few survivors are left and they must make their way as best they can. The story now turns to the individuals and how they handle their isolation.

It is obvious that some will not survive, like the attractive but vacuous young woman who is used to being waited on hand and foot and will find life impossible as the remaining machines break down. She missed the rocket back to Earth because she couldn't take all her clothes with her.

The others will find their own ways of coping, but the most successful will be Colonel Wilder, the commander of the third mission and now (briefly) Mars Coordinator, and his family. He shows them their reflections in a canal and tells them that they are now the Martians.

Although much of the science has been overtaken by later observations and there are some glaring holes in the plot it is still a powerful story with a good range of well-presented characters. Perhaps the most unconvincing is Rock Hudson as Colonel Wilder, but even he carries his part adequately. It is good to see that Bradbury's story was not badly mangled in the translation to TV. It has been around now for sixty years and is a tribute to a great writer.

The DVD seems much sharper and clearer than I remember it on TV and videotape. If the film has been enhanced then it is a very good job.

Moment of Truth
Eagle
Entertainment
R4 DVD

I nearly passed up this movie at first – it looked like just another soggy love story. I'm glad I did-

n't, for it is one of the most convoluted plots I have seen in a long time. It is well acted, well filmed, and I couldn't turn it off until I had watched it right through.



Don McKay is a very lonely high school janitor. He gets a letter from his high school girlfriend that she is terminally ill and wants to see him. Although he was the cause of a childhood accident that left some kids dead and he knows he won't be welcome in his hometown, he goes there anyway. She tells him that she doesn't have long to live but that she would like to marry him and spend her last month or so with him. Her housekeeper is a nasty type who clearly doesn't like Don. Neither does her doctor, who is clearly fond of her as well.

Next morning the doctor attacks Don and Don is forced to kill him in self-defence. That's just the start. One by one the bodies mount up and Don gets in deeper. It seems everyone in the area has it in for him and they all seem to know something that Don doesn't – even his girlfriend. For that matter Don has a secret of his own, as well. The plot has so many twists and turns, double and triple crosses, that it's hard to work out who is doing what to who – just that Don's in the middle of it and his life is in danger.

The film is a fine piece of work. Thomas Haden Church is great as Don and works his way through the film in an almost permanent case of bewilderment – understandable, really. The other actors and actresses play their more demented parts against his steady, even slightly dim character. If you like a movie with a devious plot, you will enjoy this one.



**The Phantom Empire
1935
Mascot Master Serial
Big Sky Video
R4 DVD**

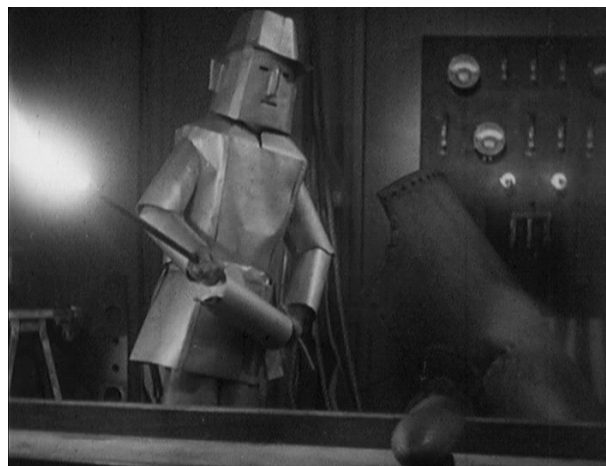
Matt Levine of Mascot was a troubled man in the 1930s. His lead actor for serials, John Wayne, had gone elsewhere to star in full-length films rather than Mascot's serials and his replacement, Ken Maynard, was only proving a reliable actor when sober (and that was rare). Levine hit on the idea of using Gene Autry, a young "singing cowboy" who had played in minor parts in other Mascot serials. Autry's first serial was *The Phantom Empire*, in 12 episodes.



The idea for the serial is supposed to have come to writer Wallace McDonald while he was having a tooth extracted under the anaesthetic gas nitrous oxide (better known as laughing gas). This story is plausible as I can't think of anyone who could write such a dreadful script and storyline while sober. It went into a very low-budget production and was a success.

In the serial Autry is part owner of a dude ranch, Radio Ranch, from which he makes a daily broadcast. Thus we get to hear Autry sing at least one corny song per episode. Despite Autry being billed as "the Singing Cowboy" the ranch is free of those annoying cows that might dirty Gene's boots or spoil the perfect whiteness of his hat. His ranch is sitting on top of Murania, an underground empire of the lost tribe of Mu.

This empire is under the control of Queen Tika and the work is done mainly by robots. With the



robots doing the work the inhabitants are free to invent the silliest costumes and hats ever seen outside a parade of archbishops. Their power is provided by a huge lode of radium ore.

Back at the dude ranch a group of evil scientists has arrived to investigate the presence of the radium ore. They realise they must take over the underground empire but they can't do this with the dude ranch inconveniently perched on top. They must remove Autry from the scene so the ranch will become derelict and they will be free to carry out their dastardly plot.

Autry is defended by a bunch of apparently parentless kids who call themselves the "Junior Thunder Riders" and ride around with ice buckets on their heads crying "To The Rescue!". In each episode we get an Autry song, a cliff-hanger ending, and a shot of Autry mounting his horse from behind (did I phrase that right? He gets into the saddle by vaulting over the rear of the horse, risking serious injury to his sensitive parts). We have the usual comic relief side-kicks, incompetent sheriff, and a few modern touches like an aeroplane.

It very soon becomes apparent that Autry was





not a great actor, but he didn't have much to work with in the inane script. What we do get is a serial so absolutely dreadful that it is hilariously funny. I guess audiences of the time weren't so discerning, but in fairness it was aimed at the Saturday matinee crowd and probably met their expectations quite well. The serial is a piece of film history and has been lovingly restored, so get your popcorn, sit back, and enjoy *The Phantom Empire*.

There is a nice range of extras in the 2-DVD set, ranging from a brief biography of Gene Autry to a couple of his other films. *Boots and Saddles* (yes, that's how they spelled it on the poster) is about turning a smug little English kid into a cowboy. *Gene Autry Doe C Does* is better unmentioned.

Scalps Cinema De Bizarre DVD-R

English language with Norwegian subtitles

This is a reissue of an old film that is a little unusual in the genre. Most spaghetti westerns concentrated on the action, the gunfights and the



women. Character development wasn't too important. This film has all those but also manages to include a bit of characterisation and a look at the theme of the white men against the Indian cultures. That is not to say it is a great work of literature, but it does have that little bit extra over most films of the genre.



Colonel Connors heads a detachment of cavalry in Indian country. He is a hard, brutal man who resents the South losing the war. He takes out his frustration on the local Indians. He wants the daughter of the local chief and is prepared to slaughter her tribe to get the girl. She escapes and finishes up at a local ranch. The rancher is an ex-cavalry man himself whose wife was scalped by Indians so there is no love lost between them but he tends to her injuries out of humanity then helps her into the hills where the rest of her tribe is scattered. She repays him by saving him from a painful death at the hands of warriors of her tribe.

Meanwhile Connors and his cavalry are after them both. The pair must learn to cooperate to save their lives.

The film is taken from what looks like an old distribution copy. The colour is faded and the focus is soft, which loses the typical harsh look of a western. It's still an interesting film, though, both as a piece of film history and as a good example of the genre.

Web: <http://www.cinema-de-bizarre.com>

Shutter Island
Paramount
R4 DVD

Shutter Island is based on the novel of the same name by author Dennis Lehane, who is best known for his mysteries *Mystic River* and *Gone Baby Gone*.



Shutter Island is one of those surprising gems you don't get to see that often. I must admit that until now I have never liked Leonardo DiCaprio. I felt *Titanic* was overwrought and that Martin Scorsese is an interesting but somewhat uneven director.

Shutter Island, however, is very different. This is a film which is never what it seems, moving between genres with what seems like a gleeful disrespect for cinematic categorization. It opens with what seems to be a film noir detective tale then moves into a conspiracy tale with what could even be seen as psychic/ghostly intrusions. It is only later in the film that it becomes an exploration of mental illness, depression, madness and loss.

It is a beautifully directed film and has some very powerful set-pieces. The flashbacks which occur to Daniels are powerful and moving, especially those connected to the concentration camps. While I have never thought much of DiCaprio, in this film he is superb; he plays Federal Marshal Teddy Daniels, the focus of the film and carries it off well.



Dr.Cawley is met by Daniels and Chuck on Shutter Island



Leonardo DiCaprio as Teddy Daniels

The plot is ingenious and has lots of twists and turns, you will probably need to watch this film a number of times to catch the many layers of meaning throughout. It is also a film made with an economy of special effects, it does not show brain surgery, electro shock and other such atrocities one may expect to see in a Fifties mental institution. While there are scenes of violence and some powerful flashbacks in regards to the Nazi concentration camps there is an emphasis on mood and suspense rather than violence or horror and this "less is more" approach is very successful.

Federal Marshal Teddy Daniels is a cop on a mission. He has taken the call to go to a remote psychiatric facility called Shutter Island which is located off the New England shore and only accessible by boat. Daniels has some baggage when it comes to the mentally ill, it seems a fire bug burnt down the block of units in which he lived with her wife and she was burnt to death. He believes that this dangerous criminal is also on Shutter Island and he is out for revenge. He also has a history of heavy drinking and is not



Daniels has a flashback about his wife



Heading towards the Lighthouse

above cutting corners to get the result he needs in a case. He is hard edged and does not retreat in any situation, something he learnt during his time in the army.

He arrives with his new partner Chuck (Mark Ruffalo) to find a heavily guarded facility ruled over by a group of strange psychiatrists include Dr. Cawley (Ben Kingsley) and Dr. Naehring (Max von Sydow), to whom he takes an instant dislike due to his experiences with Germans during the war. He has been called to the Island to investigate the disappearance of Rachel Solando, who seems to have escaped from her cell through a barred window and locked door. Rachel is violent and dangerous; she has been on the Island for some years after drowning her three children in a lake and arranging them around the dinner table. She still believes she is



Chuck, Daniel's Partner, but is he what he seems ?



Armed guards on Shutter Island

at home and has created an elaborate fantasy to justify the incursion into her reality of people on the island. Without medication she turns violent.

The more Daniels investigates the less he knows. He finds his questions are answered with more questions and information is being withheld. He is not given access to the institutions medical records and one of the doctors, Solando's primary psychiatrist, left on vacation the morning he arrived.

As Daniels explores the island looking for clues he starts to become unstuck. It begins with headaches, which then develop into migraines. He begins to have flashbacks of his experience in Germany during the war and has visions of his dead wife. Over time he comes to believe he has uncovered a major conspiracy, Shutter Island is the front for medical experiments by military intelligence. He also comes to believe that Dr. Cawley knows he is onto the real significance of the institution and has set a trap to silence him and that he will not escape the island alive. His behaviour becomes erratic and at times he is violent.

Of course, the truth of the story is far more complicated and since I do not want to destroy your enjoyment of the film I will not discuss the climax. In my mind it is certainly one of the more intriguing plots I have seen unfold on the screen and when you know the ending of the film and watch it again you will pick up hints throughout.

Shutter Island covers a myriad of themes from guilt and war crimes, to depression and madness. It is thought provoking, visually lush, intelligent and challenging.

Storage
Anchor Bay
Entertainment
(2009)
R4 DVD

This great film doesn't seem to have made the impact that it should have.

Possibly it's a bit too close to the events in a rural town in South Australia that inspired it. The film has a number of twists as the plot explores the possibilities as well as some seriously horrible and gory scenes.

Teenager Jimmy (Matt Scully) goes to live with his uncle, Leonard (Damien Garvey) following the death of his father. Leonard runs an underground storage facility where each customer is rented a lockup shed and given the only key to the lock. They are free to come and go as they wish, but the whole area is monitored by CCTV for security.

Although Leonard stresses that the privacy of their customers is critical he has an idea what some of them are doing in their storage – there is the drug maker who stores his chemicals and equipment in his lockup, and the lady whose deceased husband's effects are in storage. She sometimes comes in and browses through them.

Jimmy notices one customer, Francis, who seems to be hiding evidence of a crime in his lockup – women's clothing and a gun. He re-plays the CCTV footage and sees a human hand in the boot of the man's car. He wants to get into the lockup and check but Francis has the only key – or does he?



Zia, the secretary, reveals that Leonard has a set of lock picks in his desk. They pick the lock and confirm what Jimmy saw but Leonard is not impressed. He points out that he could be shut down for such a breach, but he is also worried that he could be hiding the evidence of a murder. He decides he and Jimmy will pay Francis a visit at his home and “throw a bit of a scare into him”. Some things are just too dodgy for Leonard to tolerate.

The sinister side of Uncle Leonard is now revealed. His “throwing a scare” consists of torturing Francis until he admits to killing his wife, then smashing his head in with a hammer.

The body goes back to the storage facility where another more horrible secret is revealed. Jimmy must now decide whose side he is on.

Matt Scully plays the confused, naïve teenager well but the film belongs to Damien Garvey as Leonard. He could be everyone's favourite uncle – there to help, tough enough to make that help count, solid and dependable. Even when he is bashing Francis' head in he makes it all sound so reasonable, so necessary.

Storage is a real gem of a film. Give it a try.



Suburban Mayhem
Icon Film
Distribution 2006
R4 DVD

I missed this film when it first came out but now I wonder why it didn't receive wider promotion. It may have something to do with this being one of the bleakest, most antisocial films in a long time. It will make you uncomfortable because it is so plausible. It takes you on a downhill ride from juvenile delinquency to full-on criminal behaviour, but because this behaviour was tolerated in the early days it is too late to stop it now.

Katrina is a little girl growing up with her younger brother and her hardworking Dad. Her mother is a drug addict and only turns up when she needs money, until Katrina's Dad tells her never to come back. Katrina and her brother grow up wild and become neighbourhood nuisances, but her doting Dad seems unable to control either of his kids. By the time Katrina reaches 19 she has a baby, a sort-of boyfriend, and an ability to control men by persuasion or sex. She is amoral, totally self-centred and uncontrollable. She is well known to the police but they are powerless to do anything about her unless she commits a major crime, and she is too clever for that.

Then the first blow falls. Her beloved little brother is put in prison for life for a murder carried out during a botched holdup. Although Katrina believes she can get her brother off the life sentence if her father will admit to sexually molesting his son, Dad refuses to do this. The relationship between Katrina and her Dad sours although this is probably as much to do with Katri-



na not being able to control her father as well as she can control other men. In a belated attempt to try to instil some sort of values into her, her Dad threatens to cut off the money he has been giving her "for the baby" – money that has actually been supporting her drug habit and party going lifestyle. Increasingly Katrina is leaving her baby with her father, Rusty (her part time boyfriend, who seems to genuinely care for her) or even with a casual friend.

The second blow falls when she finds that Child Welfare is looking for her and is thinking of taking the baby off her. In Katrina's increasingly selfish and drug-affected mind this is because she has been betrayed by everyone, not through any fault of hers. She is forming a plan. She needs money to try to get her brother out of prison and so she, Rusty, her brother and the baby can run away and find a place of their own. There is only one way to get the money – her father must die.

Katrina by now appears to have lost touch with reality, but she still has her ability to control men and she finds a likely murderer / scapegoat in a local retarded lad who will do her bidding for sex. He was her brother's best friend (he also took part in the robbery) and she plays on this friendship to persuade him to carry out the murder. The stage is now set for a dreadful finale where things do not turn out as she intended.

Emily Barclay turns in a brilliant performance as Katrina. Katrina's rapid mood swings are well-depicted and she conveys Katrina's self-centred manipulative personality perfectly.

There are quality supporting actors and actresses, and the whole film is tightly constructed and never flags. The characters are all familiar suburban types and this is what makes the film so chilling - that one person gone wrong could cause so much mayhem in so many ordinary lives.



Katrina

Van Diemen's Land Madman R4 DVD

Alexander Pearce is a character which has always captured the Australian imagination. While his life was hard and violent and his crimes shocking, the story of an Irish man's battle for survival in the Tasmanian bush has proved a fascinating tale for literature and cinema.

Various films have been made of his life including *The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce* (2008) and a horror comedy based very loosely around him called *Dying Breed* (2008). *Dying Breed* explored the descendants of Pearce who were inbred Tasmanian rednecks who ate strangers and made meat pies of them !

Van Diemen's Land (2009) is a new and powerful biographical film which attempts to faithfully explore the experience of Pearce as he travelled across Tasmania resorting to cannibal to feed his hunger. Pearce is played superbly by Oscar Redding and the film also includes the original words of Pearce in Irish with the English in subtitles.

While the hype surrounding this film was quite extreme with reviewers claiming that viewers were sick or walked from the cinema. The fact is that the film is far more a melancholic reflection on crime, punishment and the brutal experience of convicts both in captivity and on their quest for freedom. The depictions of cannibalism are subtle, the violence in context and the cinematography excellent. The whole film has a



dark and foreboding look and with an excellent score creates a powerful mood. Nature is both beautiful yet terrifying at the same time and the Tasmanian wilderness never looked so menacing.

A group of transported convicts, suffering brutal treatment at the Sarah Island penal settlement on Van Diemen's Land, tie up their jailer and escape into the Tasmanian wilderness in hopes of reaching the settlements to the east. Originally they were going to go by canoe but when followed by prison guards they hightail it into the bush with only a small amount of meat and flour.

As their food runs out and there is no sign of a settlement, they find their lack of bush skills a detriment of their survival. They are town criminals with no knowledge of hunting, fishing or even what plants they can eat. As members of the group become weakened, the others kill them off one by one and eat them until finally only one remains.

The story is as much about the psychological of survival and the paranoia of a group which knows that most of its number will die as of crime and murder. It is a dark but truly rewarding journey into Australia's past.



Oscar Redding as Alexander Pearce



Vigilante MTI Home Video R1 DVD

When you see the name you are probably reminded of the old Charles Bronson film *Death Wish*, for which *The Vigilante* was an alternate title. This film has a lot in common but in many ways is improved. It is perhaps more realistic and less gung-ho than the Bronson film. For a start, Australia is a country where handguns are not easily obtained so the use of boxing and martial arts is a more believable alternative. It also makes the film a lot more personal than Bronson's somewhat flat character of *Death Wish*.

The plot is basically similar. Wealthy businessman Luke is celebrating his engagement with his fiancée on a quiet beach. They are set upon by a local psychopath, Alex, and his two henchmen. Luke is savagely beaten and his girlfriend is raped and murdered. Luke swears revenge and starts training to get himself in shape to wreak havoc on the bad guys. He knows he has little hope of finding the perpetrators but his abilities soon make him feared among the more violent of the underground community. He becomes known as the Vigilante, and the police describe him as a nuisance.

Alex is the son of a local crime lord and is protected by corrupt police. Luke's activities soon affect their criminal activities as their drug deal-



ers and thugs are bashed and driven off the streets.

They are trying to discover Luke's identity just as he is trying to discover theirs. Luke is befriended by the female police officer who handled his case and they soon become close, but they differ in their attitudes to the Vigilante. Luke feels it should be safe for people to walk the streets at night, his new girlfriend thinks that taking the law into your own hands is one step above anarchy and that people should be more careful about their own safety.

Luke gets a lead on Alex and confronts him in a club. The club is full of the crime lord's henchmen and Luke is in for a major bashing but is saved just in time by his girlfriend. She is now convinced that Luke is the vigilante, but what can she do about it? She will not pass her information on to the police because her own superior officer is in the pay of the crime lord.

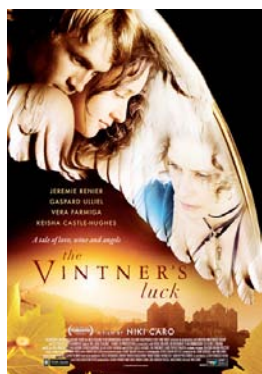
Luke brings the matter to a head by going to Alex's own home and taking on his henchmen, then Alex. The showdown is bloody and violent as both Alex and Luke are fairly evenly matched.

The film has its strengths and weaknesses. Although it is a low budget production it is quite well done. Director Aash Aaron has done a superb job, especially in the fight scenes that are the main feature of the film.

He even manages a little character development in between the fights. On the negative side some of the sound is atrocious. The sound track behind the fights is a hard driving rock tune and it is hard to hear all the dialogue over it. Apart from this, though, it is a good piece of action drama and well worth a look.



The Vintner's Luck
Icon Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD
Blu Ray



Sobran is a peasant working his small patch of land in a vineyard in Burgundy in the early 1800s. The peasants' grapes are sold to the local manor, and the manor winemaker produces wine that is at best ordinary. Sobran longs to do better. One night while drinking out his sorrows on a hillside among the vines he is visited by an angel, Xas, who recognises in Sobran a sort of fellowship of the frustrated vine grower. Xas says that he has a small garden where he comes from, and brings Sobran some cuttings from his vines. He urges Sobran to grow them in a small patch of hard stony ground owned by Sobran and otherwise useless. Sobran takes his advice and plants the cuttings. It is hard work and the soil must be improved tremendously, but he keeps at it as well as doing his normal work in the other vineyards.

Things start to improve for Sobran. He marries Celeste, the love of his life, they have a child. In his yearly meetings with the angel he is able to report progress until the time comes when his first vintage is produced. It is earthy and will take a couple of years to improve but it tastes of his passion and his sweat. Gradually it matures into a fine wine and he is taken more seriously by the Baron. Sobran and the angel become strong friends and at their annual meetings they share wine and information. Winemaking is at best a lot of experience and guesswork – the weather, the right day to pick, disease – and Sobran seems to have the luck to guess all these factors right. When the old Baron dies his daughter offers Sobran the post of winemaker and it seems Sobran's future is going to be

comfortable.

Then his youngest daughter dies. He and his wife are desolated but he asks the angel to check on her in heaven and make sure she is in no pain. The angel replies that it will be difficult but he will do his best. At their next meeting he reports that the young one is in no pain, but with further questioning he admits he has not seen her. He reveals his true situation – not all angels live in heaven, some have chosen to live in hell. Sobran rejects him and it seems their friendship is over.

Things now turn bad for Sobran. His wife is jealous of the Baroness and gives her a cream that causes cancer. The Baroness' operation is painful and disfiguring. Sobran can only produce ordinary vintages. Has he lost his touch? He misreads the weather and a vintage is all but destroyed in a freak storm. Finally disease strikes the vines and the vineyard looks like being wiped out. Only his experience and the small patch of vines he planted on the hillside, together with the Baroness' contacts, get him the new rootstock to replant.

Finally, older and wiser, he returns to the hillside to meet the angel again. Their friendship is renewed, although not without strong homosexual overtones. They are witnessed by the Baroness and Celeste. The angel reveals that there is one thing he wants Sobran to do for him. It is a terrible thing, but Sobran agrees – for his friend.

New Zealand director Niki Caro took some liberties with Elizabeth Knox's novel, and this has aroused the ire of many critics. I have not read the book so I was able to watch the film with an open mind. I thought it was quite a powerful story and well made. Although many critics compare it with Caro's previous film or with the novel, and do the same with the actors' performances, I think the film stands perfectly well by itself. It is a beautiful film, shot in France and Belgium, and the soft tones do not detract from the film but enhance it. In the strongly religious times of the story the appearance of an angel does not seem incongruous, and neither does Sobran's obsession with judging a wine in terms of its maker rather than its chemical composition. His passion is allowed to show through and there is little of the posing of modern wine judging.

If you haven't read the book, the film is well worth watching.



Wild Target
Second Sight Films
R2 DVD

French with English subtitles

Victor Maynard is a professional killer, organised, cool and 100% reliable. That is, until the day he is hired to kill Rose. He finds himself attracted to her and saves her life.

From then on he must save her from the other killers who have set out to kill her when Victor has failed. She thinks Victor is a private detective. Rose is impetuous and spoiled and seems able to do her best to land them in trouble. She is the opposite of Victor.

Victor has also picked up young Tony, a witness to one of his killings. Rather than kill Tony he is training him as an apprentice. Tony's biggest problem is that he seems unwilling to actually kill anybody – even the wounds he inflicts on others are more accidental.

Neither of these events sit well with Victor's mother, a tough old lady who has probably taken part in her share of assassinations – her husband was a killer as well and taught the business to Victor. A certain amount of family pride is involved.

The trio are forced to leave Paris as the other hired killers close in. At Victor's home in the country they can sort out their personal relationships. Rose finds that Victor is a killer. She runs away back to Paris straight into the waiting killers. A showdown at Victor's home must sort the matter out.



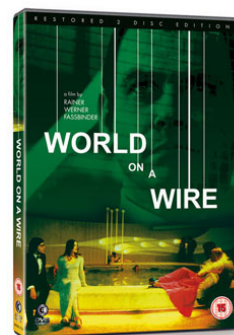
Jean Rochefort is a skilled character actor little-known outside France but with his somewhat David Niven suave looks he is perfect for the part. He has a wide range of emotions to play through during the film, but nearly always manages to maintain his dignity and poise. The other character I particularly liked, even though her appearances were brief, was Patachou playing Victor's murderous mother.

I believe this film is due for a remake soon, but it will have to be exceptionally good to beat the original. The French touch to this version lifts it above the average.

This film is a fine piece of French comedy / drama, with touches of murder.

World on a Wire
Germany
Second Sight Films
R2

German with English subtitles



Rainer Werner Fassbinder's dark story of a computer-generated world introduces a theme that is still being exploited today in films like The Matrix. The concept of a computer-simulation world is now a reality and is widely used in video games, but a quarter of a century ago when computers were new and the future was uncertain Fassbinder's film seemed prophetic – and frightening.

Fred Stiller is a leading programmer with a company that has built Simulacron, what we would now call a virtual-reality program. It is populated by about 10,000 "identity units" who go about their lives inside the program. As a microcosm of German society they can be used to explore and predict future trends like public

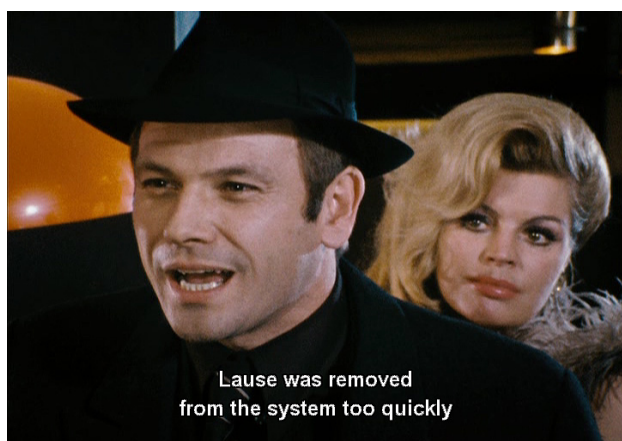




transport needs and housing. Siskins, the owner of the company, has a more sinister but profitable agenda. If he can program in industrial trends like steel production the steel company will have a tremendous advantage over its competitors – it will know what sort of market it will be facing in twenty years time.

Senior programmers in the company discover what Siskins is doing. It is against the Government controls, but before they can alert anyone they mysteriously disappear, sometimes while in plain view. They just seem to blink out of existence. All memories of them then seem to be lost. It's like they were never a part of the real world. Fred knows of two such disappearances but is unable to prove anything since there is simply no evidence they ever existed. There is more, though. They seem to have become aware of something going on inside the program. This knowledge can lead to their disappearance. His suspicion grows that the "real" world itself is behaving like a huge computer simulation and they are all just players in it. Or is he going mad? Who can help him? Who can he trust?

In the simulation there is an identity unit they have named Einstein. He is the interface between the simulated world and the real world.



They can briefly visit the simulated world and talk to Einstein to resolve problems. Einstein himself is having problems – he is becoming aware that he is a computer simulation and wants to move "up" to the real world. If, as Fred is coming to suspect, the real world is itself a simulation then there should be an Einstein equivalent somewhere close. Fred determines to find it. If it exists this will prove to him that he is not really really mad. He is aware that if he finds himself part of a simulation, though, it may tip him over the edge into madness anyway. What would you do if you find you have been programmed to believe that you are self-aware?

Fassbinder's film was played on German TV in two parts in 1973 then seemed to drop into obscurity – known about but rarely seen. This DVD version has been cleaned up and well restored from the original masters with the cooperation of the Fassbinder Foundation. Despite its age and slightly dated look it is as powerful now as when it was made.



**X-Men Origins:
Wolverine**
Fox
R4 DVD

Wolverine is a major character within the X-Men franchise and this film explores his origins and early life. A second film based on his character is also under development. One of the unique things about the X-Men franchise is its focus on alienation and the role of the "outsider".

There are not superheros in the usual sense of the word but individuals with unique gifts which make them both feared and held in awe. It also means that they are alienated from the world around (including in many cases their families) and used and abused for their abilities, especially by the military.

Wolverine, played by Hugh Jackman, is a significant figure in the franchise. He is difficult, brusque and stands separate even from other X-Men. He trusts no one and wants to work alone at every opportunity, he only co-operates when he is forced to by circumstance and need.

In this film we come face-to-face with the brutality of living as someone who is different. In revenge for what he sees as his father's death, he realizes he is adopted and has killed his real father so goes on the run with Victor Creed. Victor (in the comics known as Sabretooth) is a way too devoted brother and as they go through many lives together (they seem to be close to immortal) while Wolverine aka Logan becomes more compassionate, Victor develops a contempt for those who won't accept them.

Victor truly adores Logan but resents his desire



to live a normal life and becomes more and more violent and unstable.

The story meanders between action film, special effects spectacular and angst ridden set-pieces. At times it seems to have a trouble balancing the science fiction come superhero tale with the emotional driven themes. X-Men, the first film in the franchise, directed by Bryan Singer was far more adroit at balancing emotion and spectacle than this one.

There are lots of sub plots along the way which are used to describe the various elements of Wolverine's character as understood in the other films in the franchise. These do seem a little "forced" but since this is a prequel things do need to fit together, even if not perfectly. The most successful explanations are those about Logan's transformation into Wolverine through a government secret project using Adamantium, an element not found on earth but only in fallen meteor pieces. Logan undertakes this process as he wants revenge for the death of his wife by Victor. However as the complex tale unfolds we find his wife was an "agent" of the secret government agency and the a trap was set to extract Wolverine's DNA and use it to help create the ultimate X-Men powered weapon, Weapon XI. The battle between Wolverine and later both Wolverine and Victor against Weapon XI is impressive being set on Three Mile Island with lots of explosions and special effects.

The ongoing war between brothers Logan/Wolverine and Victor is impressive and forms the backbone of the film. Most of the other X-Men figures are stereotypical and their characters are not especially well developed. Their only role seems to be to create a stage on which the "battle of brothers" can be played out with some good old government conspiracies thrown in for good measure.

The ending of the film where Wolverine is shot with Adamantium bullets which erase his memory is a little too neat and while it sets the stage for the original films is a bit of a letdown.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine is an entertaining film with lots of action but it had so much more potential. Wolverine is one of the more interesting of the X-Men characters filled with angst, suffering and regret and so much more could have been made of him in this film. When it ended it left me with a feeling of opportunities lost.



Doghouse
Eagle Entertainment
R4 DVD and Blu Ray

Doghouse is a new type of zombie film bringing together a battle of the sexes type horror comedy like Lesbian Vampire Killers with a down-n-dirty laddish sense of humour and lots and lots of guts and gore.



The film opens with a bio of each of the main characters with an emphasis on clashes with partners and friends. They are all gathering to help one of their mates, Vince get over a rather nasty divorce and meet at a local pub and then plan to set off to a remote village for a weekend of drinking and male bonding. The actors include Danny Dyer, Stephen Graham, Noel Clarke, Terry Stone, Christina Cole who all pull off their roles rather successfully; most are well known within U.K. films and TV.

When they arrive things are not as they expected, the town seems deserted, there is a strange pagan store on the main street and mutilated military bodies are scattered throughout the village. As they retire to the pub they find there is no one to serve them but this is a minor inconvenience compared to what comes next.

It seems the women of the town have been infected by some sort of virus and become zombirds, wild rampaging cannibals with a hunger for male flesh. They cannot easily escape as the infection has also transformed Ruth (whom they call Candy), their bus driver.

This is a quirky and outrageous film which takes



Haircut anyone ?



Nice wedding dress !

the battle of the sexes into full blown horror territory. The comedy is somewhat uneven but there is some great wit and superb one-liners. I especially like when Dyer wonders if they ought to be killing these dangerous but once beautiful women and he's told, *"This is not the time to stop objectifying women."*

The creatures embody every possible female monster stereotype including a hairdresser with dangerous shears, a truly huge warrior witch with a sword, a dentist with a drill, a very bloody bride, barmaids and schoolgirls.

Doghouse is another genre horror from director Jake West who made the rather overlooked science fiction horror Evil Aliens which I rather thought a lot of. This is certainly a step forward for West and certainly offers enough scares and gore to make it a very impressive horror film as well as an eccentric comedy.

Special features include The Making of Doghouse, deleted Scenes, bloopers, alternate trailer, two TV Spots and an image gallery.



These women are dangerous !

Fashion Victims **Ariztical Entertainment** **R1 DVD**

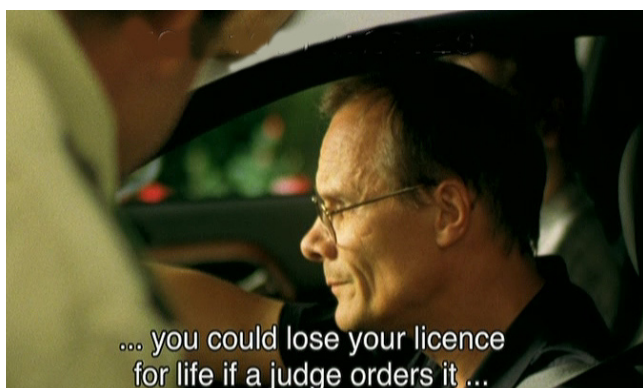
German with English subtitles

Who says the Germans can't do comedy? Just about everyone, but this film should prove them wrong. It's a little drawn out but it gets there in the end in a hilarious climax.

Wolfgang is a salesman for a clothing firm that sells fashions for the more mature woman – say, thirty five or over. He has a good steady clientele, a comfortable lifestyle and a new Mercedes of which he is very proud. His company also has a new young owner who feels that they should be selling clothes with a “younger” image. They will be sold under a separate label and will be cheaply made. They come from North Korea and Wolfgang predicts trouble for the company if the rubbish is put on the market. He has been in the business for so long that he is right, but he has become arrogant and is overruled. He is also given the bad news that when the new label is established “his” older conservative label will be phased out.

There is a pushy young salesman in the firm, Steven, who offers to sell the new clothing range. This he does by selling to Wolfgang's customers. Wolfgang hates him because he is a serious rival and even more because he is also gay.

Wolfgang's home life is deteriorating too. His spendthrift wife is being targeted by a lesbian friend, Brigitta, for something more than friendship. She is also money hungry and sees Wolfgang and his wife as good targets for donations to her “charity work”. Wolfgang is on the verge of bankruptcy but hasn't told his wife.



His son Karsten is secretly gay, and one day he meets Steven in a chance encounter and the two hit it off. Karsten is fighting with his father over a holiday he was to take before going to college. Wolfgang has hijacked Karsten to drive him around, as Wolfgang has lost his license for speeding fines. He has omitted telling his wife about this also. He is also running short of money to make his house payments and payments on his new Mercedes, and he loots Karsten's college fund to make up the difference. Despite his arrogance he is sinking deeper into trouble.

It can't go on forever, of course. His wife finds out their financial state when she pays Brigitta for damage to her car in an accident with Wolfgang's Mercedes, and when she makes a large donation to the woman's “Help Russia” charity. There is no money left in the bank account to pay their taxes and the Tax people confiscate a clock that belonged to her mother.

She leaves Wolfgang and takes refuge in Brigitta's guesthouse. Coincidentally this is where Steven is staying and on the same night as his mother moves in Karsten pays Steven a visit. Wolfgang tracks down his wife and is astonished to find Steven's car there with all the samples of the new clothing range. He loses it completely, steals the samples, accidentally drives his car into a lake, finds out his son is gay and having it off with his hated rival, gets shot at by Brigitta, tries to run her over, (I was cheering him on at this point) and looks like being charged with driving while unlicensed.

The humour is a little sad in that it reflects on the difficulty of older people having to change values in a changing world.

Even though Wolfgang is not really a likeable character at the start he soon earns our sympathy as he has to deal with the changes and the predatory amoral people around him. I really enjoyed the film.

Infestation
Icon Film
Distribution 2009
R4 DVD

Once again it's the End of the World. This time Earth has been taken over by huge mutated bugs that have cocooned everyone so their juices can be sucked out later. The film is reminiscent of the old B grade Sci Fi films but with an element of humour that makes it well worth watching.

The hero is Cooper Flynn, immature son an ex-military Dad who treats him with contempt. Cooper has just been fired from his current job when the bug attack arrives. The bugs use sonic waves to stun their prey then cocoon them. In Cooper's case he is able to break free from his cocoon and then free others in his workplace. The few survivors have a steep and fatal learning curve before they come to grips with their new world. Their only advantage is that the bugs are blind – stand still, make no noise and they will ignore you. There are, of course, those who don't learn the lesson in time. We find also that the bugs can lay an egg into a human or animal body that can turn them into a bug mutant.

Cooper leads the small group to his father's house where there is a fully stocked bomb shelter. On the way a girl who seems to be forming a liking for Cooper is taken by the bugs.

There is a huge hive just out of town and Cooper decides he must rescue her – for the first time in his life he is showing some responsibility. Dad, of course, tries to take over and dissuade Cooper from doing this but he quickly



Lots of great bugs !

learns that Cooper knows more about the bugs than he does. He seems to have trouble dealing with an enemy that he can't shoot (the noise of gunfire will only attract more of them).

Cooper is arrested by a small group of local vigilantes who lock him up until they can be sure he won't turn into a hybrid. The next people they capture are Dad and his friend. Dad points out that the bug must sting you in the small of your back to lay its egg – it's a sure-fire way to tell if someone's going to turn into a bug hybrid. He then shows them his back - and there is a sting mark. In the resulting shock they escape from the vigilantes. Dad takes some explosives from the police station and announces that they will blow up the hive. It's not going to be that easy.

Although Cooper's character is rather grating at first because of his immaturity he seems to adapt quickly and becomes more likeable. Dad (Ray Wise) has perhaps the best part and he plays it to the hilt. One of the more memorable scenes is when his pet dog is stung and hybridises into a fluffy many-legged bug. It's all a lot of good fun and if you want your horror to be not-too-horrible, you will enjoy this one.



Cooper awakens from an insect induced sleep



Some things are worse than death

Bitch Slap
Sony
R4 DVD

What a movie ! *Bitch Slap* is a homage to exploitation films from women-in-prison classics to crime spree and lesbian love-ins. It is Directed by Roger Corman protégé, Roger Jacobson, so what would one expect ? At the same time one could argue it is a post-feminist exploitation film as it celebrates women in charge and wild women's sexuality at that. It is packed with sex, violence, action and boobs. The women are all over each other and seem to want to make out in the most inappropriate locations.

The film opens with three overdressed women (Hel, Camino and Trixie) slowly climbing out of a car in the desert. The focus is on their footwear and their tightly clinging outfits. They pull a badly beaten man (Gage) out of the boot and beat and torture him to gain the location of a treasure of some form, diamonds it seems. After his hand (and balls) are crushed, he tells them where it is, but as he is about to reveal some significant information about one of the girls he is shot in the head.

As the girls look for the treasure, the story is told in flashbacks which move back in time finally focusing on a shootout at the Glory Hole Casino. The flashbacks are nicely presented, deliberately filmed with a certainly lack of reality with obvious blue screens to aid the fantasy look of the film. Each episode reveals another secret about the ladies and, of course, presents them in new outfits from lesbian nun to a bikini in the snow.

Along the way they beat the hell out of or make-out with anyone who stands in their way. The cinematography is excellent revelling in an "exploitation" look with slow pans over the wom-



en's breasts, legs and shoes, cut scenes and carefully edited violence. The film also is loaded with fast wit, double entendre and some of the filthiest dialogue you will ever hear.

As the story moves on we hear about Pinkie, a notorious gangster who runs all manner of crime syndicates and has a taste for extreme violence.

We also come to understand that Hel is actually agent Foxy69 working for some spy agency sent to retrieve a germ agent which Gage is trying to sell. But who is actually running the agency and is Trixie really as powerless as she first seems ?

The clichés abound in this celebration of sex and violence with stereotypes turned on their heads and some of the most amazing twists and turns every found in a movie plot. The characters are marvellous with the girls supported by a nutty redneck, a Japanese woman in a schoolgirl uniform with a razor edge yo-yo, a dwarf with a machine gun, lesbian nuns and too many more eccentrics to mention.

The violence is deliberately extreme with an absolutely mind boggling 30 minute fight sequence at the end. If you think you have seen women fight, think again ! There is boob grabbing, hair tearing, snatch biting and more than enough to keep you absolutely glued to the screen.

Bitch Slap takes the exploitation film to the level of an art-form, refining and expanding old themes, adding a 21st century approach to sex and violence and walking a fine line between men's fantasy and women's empowerment, watch it and make up your mind. I loved it !

**Destination:
Outer Space
Saint Euphoria
Pictures
R1 DVD**

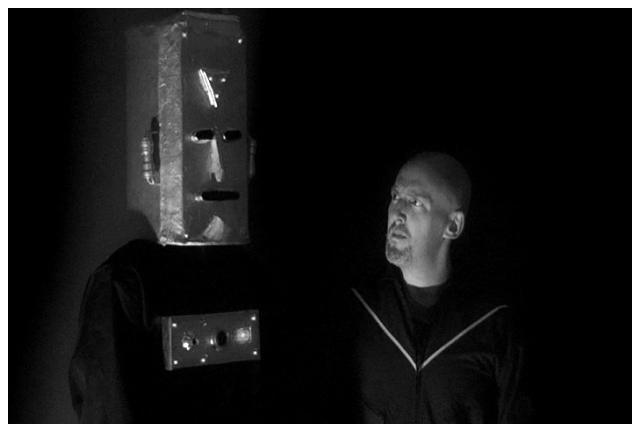
Christopher Mihm is back with his newest spoof of the 1950s budget SF films. This film marks the return of Josh Craig as Captain Mike Jackson whom we last saw in *Cave Women on Mars*. In that film he was forced to leave one of his crewmen behind and he has been paying for it ever since.



He has turned into an alcoholic, suspended from the *Rocket Command* and estranged from his father and most of his friends. Then out of the blue his father offers him a mission in what may be reconciliation. He is given the chance to test pilot a new faster-than-light spaceship. The mission will be dangerous and Captain Jackson will need to keep his wits about him.

Naturally the ship goes off course and he must crash it into a wild but inhabited planet. He is taken prisoner by a female equivalent of Han what's-his-name in that other movie and is to be sold into slavery. Throughout the film there are passing swipes at both *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. Jackson escapes from the ship in the emergency pod and is rescued by a robot. Well, it's a man with a cardboard box on his head, but that's near enough. He learns that the robot may have the knowhow to send him back to Earth but the transport beam the robot must use is under the control of an alien race who feel it is their mission to dominate the galaxy, as they all do.

It is up to Captain Jackson to penetrate their base, fight off the aliens and let the robot in to



work the transport beam. At the end Jackson faces a choice that may mean he will never see Earth again.

Like all good shows, to be continued.

All very dramatic, but it's hard to stop laughing as Captain Jackson deals with a space suit helmet that looks like a lampshade held together with very obvious duct tape, a spaceship that looks like a radio from a 1950s car, dodgy scenery, a rubber spider on a string and one-eyed aliens wearing spherical lightshades on their head.

The background soundtrack is perfect – that brassy distorted sound that was so popular in the 1950s radio serials suits this sort of film so well. It's Christopher Mihm's best work so far.

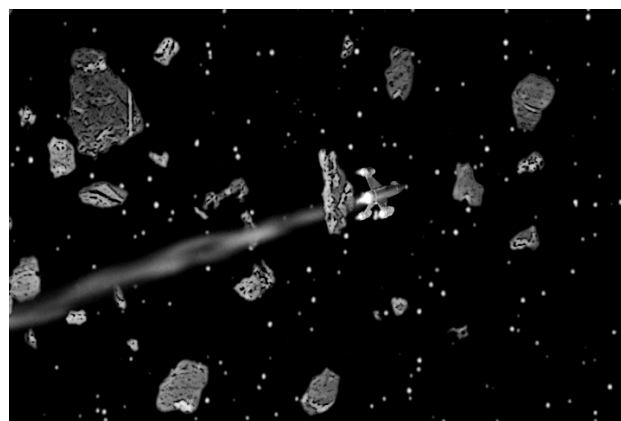
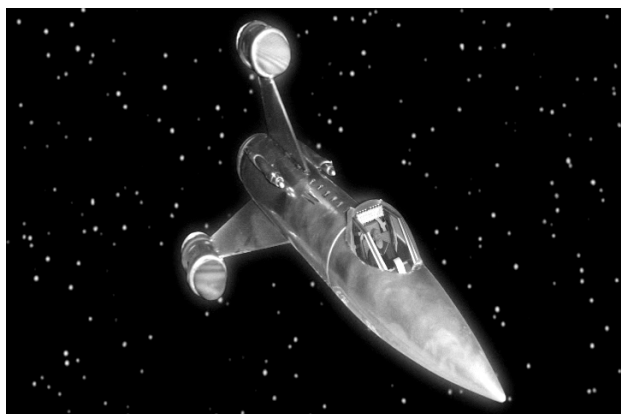
We also get the usual bloopers reel, commentaries and a photo gallery.

"Glorious era-appropriate black and white science fiction"

Saint Euphoria Films

Christopher Mihm

Web: <http://www.sainteuphoria.com/>



The Dinner Party
SilverSun Pictures
Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment
Region free

This deep and dark film explores people's reactions to an impending disaster – they know or suspect there is trouble brewing, but how do they handle it? Their reactions are mixed, but how would any ordinary person handle such a crisis? In this respect it is a very uncomfortable film.

Angela and Joel have been together for a couple of years now, but Joel wants to break up because Angela is becoming stranger by the day. She is increasingly possessive and demanding, irrational, and addicted to prescription drugs. She has drawers full of these in her bathroom. They have invited some of their friends to a dinner party and Angela has told some people that she and Joel will commit suicide later so they can be together forever. Most of their friends don't take her too seriously – as Freddy says, she is "a drama queen, a weirdo". They turn up anyway for the free feed.

Before the party Angela has taken her friend Maddy to buy heroin with which she and Joel will overdose after the party. Maddy is seriously worried. Angela can only afford enough heroin for one strong dose so Maddy goes back to buy another dose for Angela. She arranges with the drug dealer, though, to fill the syringe with sugar solution.

Joel invites an old girlfriend, Skye, to the party to make up the numbers as he doesn't have many friends of his own left. He fully intends to leave Angela that night after the party and obviously knows nothing of Angela's demented plan. Angela feels threatened by Skye and orders her out of the house. She then spikes Jo-



el's coffee with Rohypnol and he collapses. Freddy is sure Angela has spiked Joel's coffee but he and Matt leave when Angela tells everyone that Freddy has taken some of her valium and accuses him of spiking the coffee instead. Maddy is the only one left, and in spite of her worries about Joel's health and Angela's mental state she is persuaded that he will be all right and leaves. She visits Matt, who is about to call the police, and points out to him that they will all be arrested for manslaughter if the police realise they were there and did nothing to stop the suicides. Everyone just waits to see what happens.

Angela injects Joel with one syringe then injects herself with the other, believing they both have a heroin overdose. Because one syringe contains sugar solution, one of them will die and the other will live. The survivor and the guests will have to face the consequences.

The story is rather slow-moving, but I can't see any other way that director Scott Murden could have built up the tension so well. We are aware from the start that Angela is mentally disturbed but Murden uses little snippets here and there to reinforce the idea and give examples of her obsessive behaviour. One such is when she insists that Joel change his clothes before the party and goes into a sulk when he refuses. Her barbed comments to the guests and her almost vicious rudeness to Skye when she finds Skye is Joel's old girlfriend reinforce her illness. Incidents like these also explain why the guests are happy to depart one by one and leave Joel to his fate.

The cast has been well selected from unknowns. Lara Cox as Angela is quite chilling as the smiling but insane "white witch". In common with a lot of the best independent films, quality acting and direction has overcome the low budget.



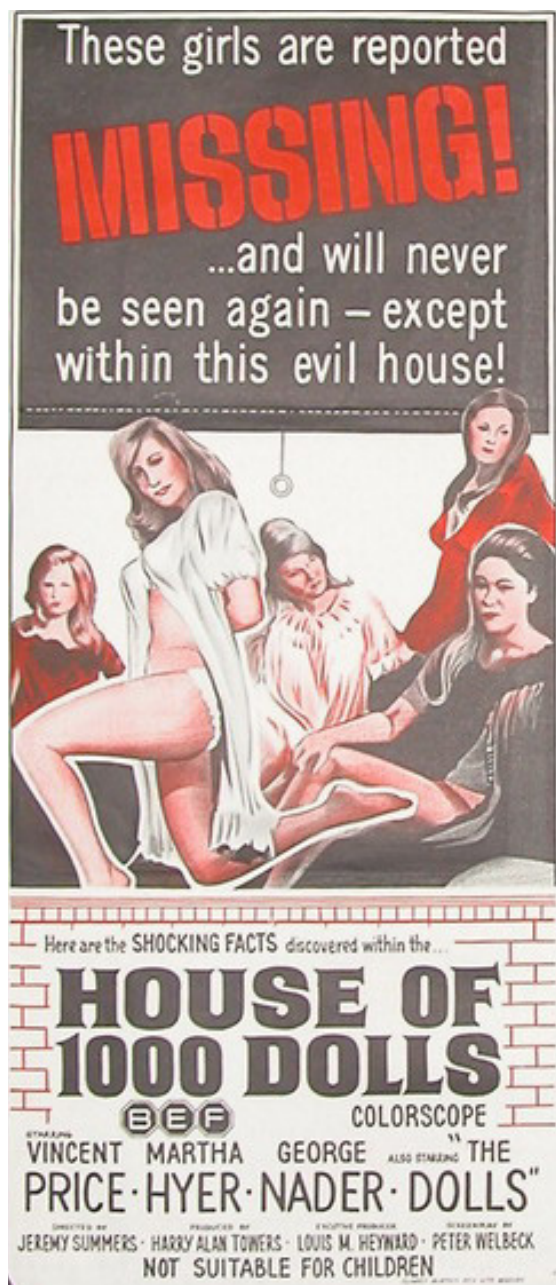
House of 1000 Dolls
Umbrella
Entertainment
R4 DVD

House of 1000 Dolls has never before been released on DVD and stars Vincent Price and Maria Rohm. Originally released in 1967 it is a white slavery story with a twist. Nightclub magician Felix Manderville (Vincent Price) and his mentalist partner travel the world entertaining audiences and along the way hypnotize young women, kidnap them and send them back to Tangiers in coffins where they are used and abused in the brothel known as the House of 1000 Dolls.

The story opens as a young man travels for Madrid in search of his girlfriend who has gone missing. He believes she has been seen in Tangiers and he arrives to search for her. It is not an easy task as Tangiers is filled with brothels and the locals do not trust foreigners much at all.

Out on the town for the night he somehow improbably finds his girl amount a myriad of sex clubs at the House of 1000 dolls but is brutally murdered on his way home. His friend Doctor Armstrong (George Nader) a dislikeable and arrogant American doctor of criminology decides to investigate on his own but not before the danger reaches into his own home when this wife goes missing.

The film is filled with stereotypical images; the lax Tangiers cop, the arrogant American, the



corrupt hypnotist, the vicious henchmen and, of course, the innocent exploited girls who loose their clothes at the drop of a hat!

It was made as an international production with both English speaking and non-English speaking actors; much of the dialogue is dubbed and hence somewhat wooden but it is a typical cult film of its period.

A classic exploitation film filled with scantily clad women, a domineering madam and punishment for escaping young women it is somewhat dated but loads of fun.

A XXX edition was also made with different actors and add-in footage.



Iron Claw The Pirate
Turkey
Onar Films

Web: <http://www.onarfilms.com>

Turkish with English subtitles

This is another wonderful fantasy from the early days of the Turkish film industry. After World War II people wanted entertainment but there was very little homegrown Turkish product. Producer Cuneyt Arkin was one who set out to fill this gap with budget knockoffs of film genres that were popular around the rest of the world. Accuracy was not important, attractive women and lots of action was.

The films were definitely B grade but had an appeal all their own and Onar Films has been recovering the originals and re-releasing them.

The plot is straightforward. The evil criminal mastermind Fantomas wants a microfilm that the Professor has. He will stop at nothing to get it. Against him is Turkish Security and their secret weapon, Iron Claw. Iron Claw is not a pirate regardless of the name of the film. Nor is he



particularly secret since we see him often without his trademark mask and cloak. Nor does he have anything resembling an iron claw. He seems to possess some sort of psychic ability to find Fantomas and his evil henchmen wherever they are hiding. He and his attractive female sidekick will then go in, guns blazing, to the rescue. They are helped in deciding who to shoot by the large letter F conveniently placed on the baddies' chests.

In between we get rather plump young ladies (scantily clad, of course) doing a sort of dance that consists of standing there wobbling. There is, of course, the comic Uncle who will stuff things up at any chance. There are car and motorbike chases galore although it must be said that Iron Claw seems to have a lot of trouble riding his motorbike in a straight line.

In its day this film must have been the height of action drama. Tastes are now a little more sophisticated, but the film is still a lot of fun. Onar's reissue has been cleaned up for this DVD. The picture is still a little soft and the sound is not great but overall it's a great example of a brief period in Turkish film history.



Mega Piranha
The Asylum
Peacock Films
R4 DVD

Mega Piranha was the highest rated movie on the SYFY Cable TV channel in the US for 2010. Obviously it was not celebrated for its serious sci-fi content, suspense or even acting, no I think it was celebrated as the most audacious piece of B grade monster movie trash made in quite a while. This is extremely low budget schlock which centres on a truly insane plot. Scientists have engineered a mutant form of piranha which is getting exponentially larger by the hour and is chomping its way from South America to Florida! I kid you not, this is the plot which is even further enlivened by a stereotypical view of gung-ho Americans and South American military dictatorships.

Paul Logan is Jason Fitch, Navy Seal and all American hero. When an American diplomat and the foreign affairs minister for Venezuela go missing he is sent into investigate. The local military Junta are convinced that the killing was committed by terrorists or worse, elements of the CIA but there is another possibility. Fitch is met at the airport by Sarah Monroe (played by faded 80s pop sensation Tiffany of one hit wonder fame "Do you think we're alone now") who advises him that she is a scientist in a project by UNESCO and that an experiment to increase the meat content of fish has gone terribly wrong. Rather than increasing the protein content of edible fish, the project has created a monster piranha which is not only exponentially increas-



ing in size but is a hermaphrodite and hence reproduces all by itself.

Sent to Venezuela by Bob Grady (played by Barry Williams/Greg Brady) he tries to negotiate with the local military. Only when a super large piranha is slammed on the desk do they believe what is happening. They try and use every possible weapon on hand to kill them but even bombing them doesn't work. Of course by now they are as big as cows and are eating through boats and flying out of the water like Kamikaze. But these fish just keep growing, as the insanity of the movie increases, they become the size of small houses and thrown themselves into buildings ! The sight of badly rendering CGI mega fish the size of a house throwing themselves from the ocean into Florida townhouses is hilarious as is much of the film.

Since the threat becomes more and more serious, I mean these damn fish have eaten a battle ship, a helicopter and a nuclear submarine, they bring out the ultimate weapon, the good old American soldier, oozing masculinity from every pore and with a grunt and a growl ready to save the day. At last these pesky fish are made to bleed and they turn on each other in a feeding frenzy and the danger to civilization has passed.

This is a movie which needs to be celebrated for what it is, a B grade schlock monster film which does not try to be anything else. It is unapologetically silly with exaggerated characters, bad CGI and comic book heroes and villains all of which work together to make it a sensationally good laugh.



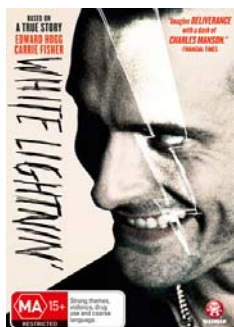
**White Lightnin'
Vice Films
Madman
R4 DVD**

This film is not, as you may suppose, about moonshine running. It is a very bleak film about the effects of drugs on a young mind and the influences of simplistic religion on that mind. The combination can only lead to trouble.

Young Jesse is an uneducated backwoods kid who finds very early that he can get a high by sniffing petrol or lighter fluid. This is called "huffing". As his brain becomes affected he gradually deteriorates until he can't tell the difference between right and wrong and doesn't really care. His Daddy tries his best but he is also a simple backwoodsman and he just can't handle the job. One person who does have some influence on Jesse is a local fire-and-brimstone hokus preacher who has a very simplistic if scrambled view of the Bible and the Lord's Will, but when Jesse is high on fumes even the fear of the Lord holds no terrors for him.

Inevitably Jesse finishes up in juvenile prison then in an adult prison. Each time he is let out he can "feel the Devil moving in my blood" and will commit another crime of violence. The line between rationality and violence is very, very thin. In a last desperate attempt to teach Jesse something useful his Daddy has taught him the only talent he has – to dance a form of tap / shuffle popular among the rednecks for its deft footwork. Even that can't keep Jesse out of trouble, though, and he finishes up back in prison. While he is inside his Daddy is murdered by a vicious pair of local rednecks. While the idea of vengeance is appealing, Jesse is clean when he leaves prison and he remembers the preacher's teachings about leaving retribution to Jesus. He teams up with his Daddy's old guitar player and starts dancing for money in the bars of the area. They are reasonably popular but the old demon is still lurking in his mind. One night he is heckled by a customer and beats the man savagely with a heavy ashtray. His guitar player drives off and leaves him to his fate.

Jesse's idea is to hijack a car to get him home. He gets a lift in a car driven by a lady he nicknames Priscilla. Although she is married she leaves her husband and kids to live with him. In



his own simple style he rates her as "the best pussy I ever had. The cleanest too". His life could be improving but not for long.

One of his friends has just been let out of prison, and is killed by the same rednecks who killed his father. He snaps and decides to take revenge, the preacher's teachings forgotten. Priscilla, sensing the impending blow-up, leaves him. The revenge on the rednecks is cruel and bloody and in his twisted mind they have also killed Priscilla. He accidentally kills a sheriff's deputy who is investigating then realises he must go on the run. There is an old cabin way back in the woods where the preacher lives, if he is still alive.

Jesse makes his way to the cabin and is berated by the preacher for taking the Lord's work unto himself. Or is it all in Jesse's by now completely irrational mind? There is only one way to make amends to Jesus. Possibly inspired by "if thy hand offends thee, cut it off" he goes into a frenzy of self-mutilation and quasi-religious fervour.

The story is filmed in black and white with only occasional flashes of muted colour that serve to highlight the few good moments in Jesse's tortured life. The problems of petrol sniffing are current and prevalent in many outback villages in Australia as well as other countries. Fundamentalist religions that draw on and emphasise selected parts of the scriptures and influence young minds are an evil that seems to be increasing, and not only among the deep-South Christians. Is there any way out of this? Don't look to this film for help.

The character acting is brilliant, especially Ivan Nedarevic as the young truculent Jesse. Since the film is narrated by Jesse it needs a strong credible script to carry it off. It works. Only briefly does offer any hope for a better life, but there is always the devil in Jesse waiting to break through.

Image © UK Film Council / Mountain Productions Limited 2008



Anime Japanese Love Doll

Topco Sales

Web: <http://www.topcosales.us/>

I am not quite sure why the Editor gave this to me. I can honestly say I have never played with dolls before, not even Action Man figures.

Since I am now of quite advanced years (my kids prefer the phrase "geriatric old fart") I am unlikely to take it up in the future. Still, the Editor is a strange man at times – who knows what he was thinking?

First, the doll is not really a doll in the style that I remember my sisters playing with. She is made of vinyl with her features painted on. Most collectible dolls are made from bisque (unglazed porcelain) or full fired and painted porcelain. We can assume, then, that she is not intended to be a collectible doll. Modern dolls meant for little girls to play with are usually made from fairly durable soft plastic.

This one is made from soft vinyl, sure, but it doesn't look too durable to me. Rough treatment could lead to damage, so I guess she is not a "playing-with" doll.

She is over a metre tall when inflated and this could make her difficult for small girls to manage – who wants a dolly that towers over you? She is also a bit tall to be displayed on a shelf.

Being Japanese I thought she would come dressed in one of those gorgeous costumes that the Japanese and Chinese do so well. Unfortunately, no. Although she is well painted (she even has a tattoo) her complete lack of clothing is a bit of a letdown. This would disappoint those little girls who like to dress up their dollies in different outfits.

The lack of clothing also highlights what must



be a number of moulding flaws in the doll, in the mouth and ...um.. other areas.

These flaws have been repaired with glued in vinyl tubes but they do not fit very well and seem to go a long way inside the doll. Perhaps the top one is so you can feed dolly from a bottle, but the lower two are puzzling.

The advertising on the box is a little puzzling, too. Instead of the usual "burp your dolly to sleep" or "change your dolly's nappy" you get "Fulfil Your Asian Fantasies".

What sort of fantasies would little girls have about Asians? As I read further I found "Discover the Oriental Secrets" – so that's it ! It must be a teaching aid for little girls to learn things like Asian Cookery.

Now all I have to do is find a little girl to give the Doll to. Won't her mother be surprised at what her little girl can learn from it !

Topco Sales

Topco Sales is a global distributor of adult products and has a wide range of interesting and surprising goods including a solid selection of unusual dolls, whips, bondage goods and sex toys.

Deep Contact
Pink Eiga
R0 DVD

Deep Contact reminds me of the old 1970's porn films such as 2069 yet done with superior production values, more comedy and a far more peculiar plot. It dates from 1998 yet has Seventies porn music and soft-core adult content with lots of tits and bums. It is both erotic and very funny, filled to the brim with sex yet presented with a truly eccentric flair. It is surprisingly well presented with excellent cinematography and looks better than a lot of Pink Cinema on the market.

The year is 1999, and a comet is on a collision course with Earth! It is too late for a traditional scientific solution so what can be done? Well the United Nations runs a secret facility where psychics are trained to focus on their energy on deflecting the comets from its path. The method they use to generate this great reserve of psychic power is especially bizarre, the sexual orgasm. It seems that the best form of psychic energy is psychosexual and is released at the moment of orgasm.

Watura is a no hoper who has lost his job and owes money to the Yakuza, but he has a unique gift, he is over endowed in the dick department. He is kidnapped and taken to the facility where his role in saving the world is outlined to him. At first he resists but the idea of wild orgies all in the name of science is too much to resist.

With other psychosexual psychics he must endure weeks of sex addiction training to make him more and more horny, even the nurses are in on the training since none of them is allowed to wear any panties. As Watura trains harder and harder (!), he must finally mate with Ikuko to release a wave of psychosexual energy and save the earth.



Deep Contact is presented in a fully uncut and unrated edition in Japanese with very clear English subtitles. Extras include a still image slideshow, original artwork, trailers, biographies and filmographies, an interview with Director Yukio Kitazawa, a video commentary with the cast and crew and trailers of other Pink Eiga titles.

Web: <http://www.pinkeiga.com>

Groper Train
Wedding Capriccio
Japan
PinkEiga

Japanese with clear subtitles

This is another in the Japanese PinkEiga collection of Japanese erotica. It has a lot in common with the Danish "*In The Sign Of...*" series in that the plots are simplistic but funny, the young ladies are attractive, and the sex scenes are tasteful and extended.

The plot – a young girl from the country has come to the city to avoid being married to a country redneck. She has a job with Kuroda, the world's greatest detective, but she hasn't been paid in months. Now the redneck is coming to the city to claim her and take back home to be married. She has to come up with another fiancé in a hurry.

Each day she rides the Groper Train, a packed commuter train where girls are routinely groped in the packed carriages. She is groped by a





young conductor (he composes on a Casio calculator keyboard) and arranges with him to move in for a couple of days, pretending to be engaged, until the troublesome redneck has gone back home.

This works out well for both of them but the demented conductor fills in a marriage licence and gets her fingerprint onto it while she is asleep. She is now married to him.

Meanwhile the conductor's very wealthy father is dying. He hires the detective to find his missing daughter who ran off with an ex-convict some years ago. Back to the Groper Train where the detective looks for a distinctive diamond filling in each girls mouth (while also working a bit lower down).

The ex-criminal decides to have the daughter killed so he can inherit her money. The conductor is killed accidentally by the redneck, who is a bit careless with his gun. Who gets the blame? Who gets the money? Who gets the girl?

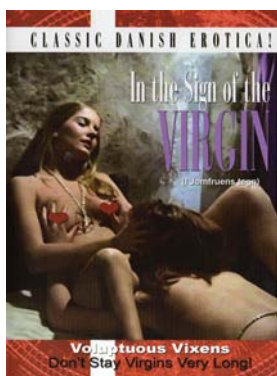
Who cares? It's a lot of fun and director Jojiro Takita seems to have enjoyed himself making it.

Web: <http://www.pinkeiga.com>

**In The Sign Of The Virgin
Smirk
MVD
R1 DVD**

Danish with English subtitles.

Another in the Classic Danish Erotica series. These reissues show that the Danes liked their erotica with a bit of humour. They are all well-filmed with attractive non-silicon-enhanced girls. Production values throughout the "In The Sign Of ..." series were high although the plots ranged from funny to farcical. This is definitely



one of the more farcical ones.

A learned but naïve Doctor has discovered that Venus is about to enter the house of Jupiter. A couple of hundred years earlier when this last happened and the conjunction was centred on the Hawaiian islands a tremendous orgy ensued which is still talked about in astrological circles. This time the conjunction of planets will be centred over the little village of Petit Bois in Denmark. The village has a girls school and the girls must be saved from themselves as their sexual instincts are aroused by the conjunction. The Doctor has invented a drug that depresses the libido and he arranges to administer it to the girls.

Meanwhile another mad scientist has invented another drug that does the exact opposite. He wants to try it out on a village where there are a number of young girls to prove that it works.

The girls themselves are not as innocent as their headmistress believes. Indeed, some fill in at the local brothel when their urges overtake them.

Naturally the two potions get switched, and naturally the girls school gets the horniness potion in its drinking water. The Doctor goes on to dump the rest of the potion in the village's drinking water thinking he will do the villagers a favour as well.



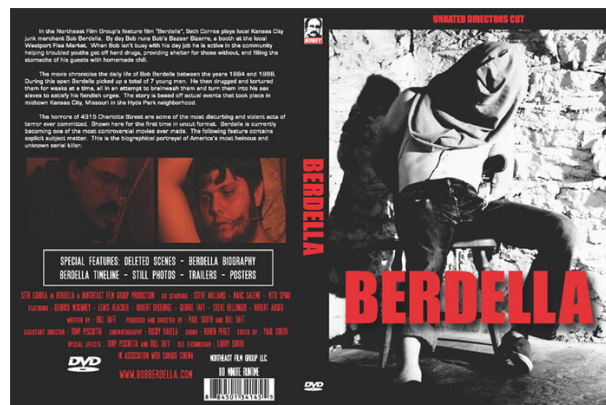
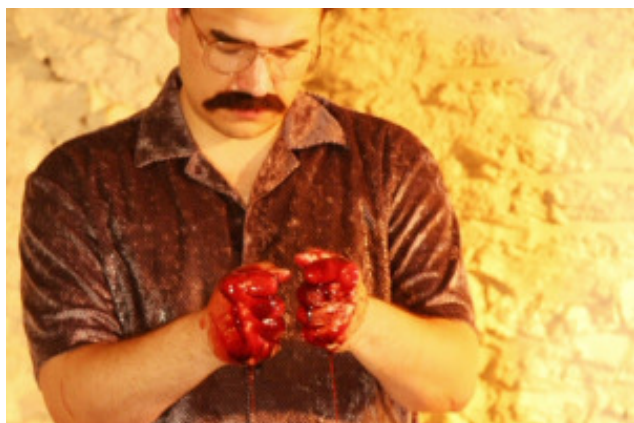
Berdella
North East Film Group
R1 DVD
Web: <http://www.bobberdella.com/>

When you look at the world of horror films from vampires to werewolves, ghosts to aliens, the reality is that the most horrid and terrifying story of all is the human story. Only human beings torture and kill for pleasure and these tales are the most confronting. Bob Berdella is not a serial killer who is especially well known, however, between 1984 and 1988 he terrified Kansas city by kidnapping, torturing and then killing men he found in the local gay community to satisfy his uncontrollable sadistic urges.

The film *Berdella* is a low budget B grade film which at times seem to dwell on the viciousness and violence of Berdella without offering much insight. There is no real background to the origins of Berdella's madness nor on his trial and imprisonment. The film ends when one of his victims escapes and we can obviously conclude he will be caught. I would have liked to see a lot more exploration of the reasons behind Berdella's killing spree. It is unusual to find a gay serial killer and as some have mentioned, his sexuality while shown in the film, is not really explored nor his motives examined. However it should be said that the film does create a suspenseful mood and evokes the time and environment in which Berdella lived and committed his crimes.

Berdella was to most a middle aged eccentric who operated an occult curio shop "Bob's Bazaar Bizarre," at the Westport Flea Market. His double life was only exposed after a wounded man wearing nothing but a dog collar escaped from the second-floor window of Berdella's Hyde Park home.

Soon Berdella's collection of trophies including polaroid pictures and skulls as well as extensive

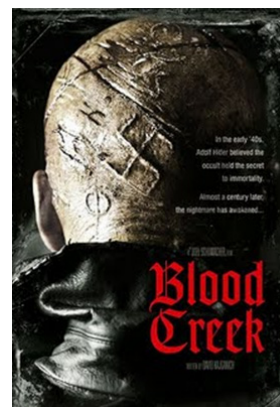


documentation of each kill was uncovered and his was on trial for his life. His was convicted of killing six men, injecting them with animal tranquilizers and then torturing them to death. Berdella died in prison from a heart attack in 1992.

This is a low budget film so the acting and filming is average that being said Seth Correa is convincing as Berdella and the brutality of the torture depicted is realistic. It is an interesting and confronting exploration of the violent crimes of a lesser known killer.

Blood Creek
Lionsgate 2010
R1 DVD

Blood Creek is a horror from the well-respected director Joel Schumacher, but don't let that cloud your judgement. Yes he made *Batman* and *Robin* and *Batman Begins* but this is much more of an indie style film and is very surprising.



It is an unusual cult horror film in that it uses





Nazi occultism to spin quite an bizarre tale. In the Thirties Hitler and the inner circle of the Third Reich come to believe that the black arts will help bring National Socialism to the world. Accordingly they send runic occultists to rural locations in the United States to carry out their nefarious research.

One family, a bit low on cash, welcome the Nazi academic believing him to be some sort of strange historian. However, Wirth seems to know a lot more about them than they do about him. He knows they have found a rare runic artefact on their property and he plans to use its power to turn himself into some sort of demigod via the means of some very dark magic.

Of course with any quest for untrammelled power there is a hitch and Wirth needs blood, human blood, fresh, from the source and lots of it. He first starts to use the family's daughter and then their son; in the end they begin to kidnap vagrants and bums for his food to save their own skin. In return he grants them immortality,



but of course there is a catch, they must continue to feed him for if they do not he will escape and kill with abandon. As he becomes more and more powerful they use their own knowledge of the ancient runes to imprison him but continue to captive locals to feed him.

As time passes and we head into the Nineties, another local is captured and kept for some years to feed the now zombie like Wirth. However, he escapes and enlists his brother to return and kick some arse. Of course in doing so Wirth gets released and a battle ensues with zombie dogs, living dead horses, runic battles and lots of guts and gore. Of course the ending is open as the hero finds that seven other families had Nazi occultists sent to them during the Thirties so off he goes armed and ready to fight and destroy the Nazi occult menace!

The special effects are well done, Wirth as the vampire/runic sorcerer looks amazing especially with the development of his third eye ! The zombie horses are cool and offer one of the more impressive and over the top scenes in the film.

The acting is solid, Michael Fassbender, Dominic Purcell and Henry Cavill are credible and the plot has enough twists and turns to keep you on the edge of your seat right the way through.

One of the things that perhaps works against this film is the name Joel Schumacher, people will expect a big budget extravaganza and when they get a medium budget semi indie horror film they will be a little confused. However, if you forget who directed it and enjoy it for what it is you will be surprised at the creativity on show in *Blood Creek*.



Gotta feed that monster !

**Darkroom
Madman
2 DVD Set
R4 DVD**

This TV series from the early 1980s is very strongly reminiscent of Rod Serling's old show *The Twilight Zone*. For those who never saw it (and *Twilight Zone* goes back to the days of black and white TV) Serling presented a weekly show with a one-hour mystery. The subjects varied widely but all had a common theme of the unexplained and how it may affect real life. It appears to have been duplicated in this series presented by James Coburn. Unfortunately the series was short-lived.

The stories presented are of a similar style to the *Twilight Zone*. We get two or three stories per episode. They seem to be perfectly ordinary, but then the mystery starts to creep in.

Some examples:

A television anchor-man finds his company has not only been duplicating him in a computer but intends to use the computerised version instead of him to present "his" news. He is initially appalled but comes to accept it, looking forward to having the time to do all the things he never did when he was younger. But there's always a catch

Charlie buys his son a crystal radio set that has the ability to tune into broadcasts from 1942. In an effort to prevent his father's troopship from



being torpedoed he tries to tamper with time. Never a wise move.

Needlepoint. A very short story showing why you shouldn't dismiss the power of witchcraft, or murder a witch.

Siege of 31 August.

Neal is a Vietnam vet and his 10-year old son Ben wants to follow in his footsteps and go to a military academy – at least, it seems so. He may be just doing it to please his father. Neil gives him a set of toy soldiers and they seem to be becoming real in his son's mind. He has built a toy military camp behind the barn, but it seems to be growing. The soldiers are now talking to him. They have told him about a dark incident in Vietnam in which Neil was involved. Neil can now hear the soldiers at night, fighting. Is he on the edge of madness? Is his past coming back to haunt him? Or are the plastic soldiers really coming to life?

The stories are well written and well-acted.



Darkroom is hosted by James Coburg

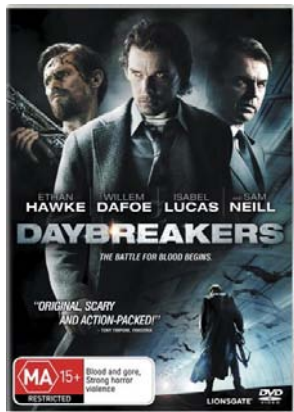
Daybreakers
Sony Pictures
R4 DVD

It is hard to come up with a horror film these days that doesn't leave the audience with the feeling that they have seen it all before. This Australian film has a truly interesting twist to a rather tired genre. It is superbly acted and filmed, not a budget production.

A vampire virus has infected the world. Most people have now been "turned" by the virus or by being bitten but they manage to continue as normal in their usual jobs – just at night now. Humans are an endangered species but the vampires depend on the humans for fresh blood. Drinking vampire blood will cause the vampire to revert to an older, primitive form and these are a menace to human and vampire alike. They are destroyed on sight but their numbers are increasing.

The big pharmaceutical companies are farming captured humans in their desperate search for blood but even so the world's blood supplies are running out. The companies are also in a race to develop a blood substitute. The first to succeed will make billions of dollars but success seems elusive.

Ed Dalton is a haematologist involved in the race for a substitute. He has reservations about drinking human blood, especially after his boss tells him that the substitute will not suit everyone – there will always be those willing to pay more for the genuine article and may even enjoy the benefits of immortality. Essentially he sees the blood substitute project as giving his livestock a chance to repopulate. What Dalton needs is a cure for the vampire condition that will make hu-



man blood completely unnecessary. He falls in with a group of humans, one of whom has been involved in a road accident. In a strange mix of circumstances he has been cured of his vampire condition and Dalton thinks this may be the breakthrough he needs. If he can replicate the conditions of the accident he can cure vampirism.

Meanwhile the world is falling apart as the blood runs out. Food riots are becoming common. The ruling powers are deliberately capturing the lower Level 4 vampires, the dregs, and exposing them to sunlight to reduce the drain on supplies and cut the number of reverted vampires. It is at the point where there is less than a month's blood available. Even the Army can't contain the situation – the soldiers are starving too. Will both species perish?

It is common these days to put a big-name actor in a film to give it a bit of credibility. At first I thought Sam Neill and Willem Dafoe may have filled this role, but after seeing the film it's hard to imagine anyone else for the cold-blooded mercenary corporation head Bromley or the Elvis-loving human. Ethan Hawke was an early choice for the lead role of Dalton but it was because he fitted the part so well.

All the actors stand up superbly in their parts and there is no hint that any particular actor is carrying the film. The effects are good if a little unrestrained, courtesy of New Zealand's Weta studios, and there is enough action to keep everyone happy. There are even little comic touches. Vampires exploding when caught in sunlight are now the biggest cause of forest fires.

The film comes with an extras disk that is quite comprehensive, from Lionsgate's initial funding of the film based simply on a story treatment to the final product.



Dead Fury
BlackArro Productions
Unearthed Films 2008
R1 DVD

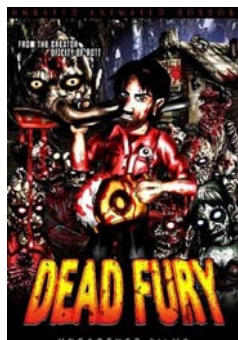
Some years ago an animated zombie film called *City of Rott* caught peoples imagination. Now producer Frank Sudol has done it again with *Dead Fury*. It is not a sequel to *City of Rott*, but a complete new film drawing heavily on old favourite films like *The Evil Dead*. So if it's so derivative, why bother? The animated format has allowed Sudol to indulge in an orgy of gore and slaughter that is so excessive that it becomes funny. Cutting a demon down to a knee-deep pile of body parts with a powersaw is hard to do in conventional film but easy in animation.

The plot is fairly straightforward so it doesn't get in the way of the carnage. Max, a couple of his friends and his senile, gun happy, hard swearing Pop are hunting deer on a piece of private land where they shouldn't be. The land was owned by a local group of inbred freaks who retreated from civilisation, sick of being ridiculed for their looks. They have been taken over by demons who are determined to rid the Earth of normal people and make it safe for freaks.

One by one Max's group is taken over by the demons. In the end it is just Max and his little electric saw against the freaks and demons. Can he fight his way through the increasing pile of blood and guts and escape with his life?

Although the backgrounds are beautifully drawn, the animation (especially when they are walking) is a bit crude. This, however, is the only criticism I can make of this hilarious parody.

Features include "The Making of...", a commentary by Frank Sudol, a slideshow and deleted scenes.



Feeding the Masses Horror Collection
Shock-O-Rama Cinema
R1 DVD Collection
Web: <http://www.alternativecinema.com>

This compilation of "4 Fearsome Films" includes a range of fairly recent movies that generally fit the Horror genre. That is not to say that they are all good films – some things should be left buried in the vaults. Let's look at each of the films and see how they fare.

Feeding the Masses (2005)

It would be hard to call a zombie movie "intelligent", but this one works. It is not so much a zombie film as a film with lots of zombies. A strange virus has got loose, the Lazarus virus, and as usual it is turning people into zombies and raising the dead. The Government is in denial and is broadcasting reassuring platitudes to the population to prevent mass panic. Some of the spin is simply unbelievable.

"The virus will have a positive effect on unemployment"

News is censored so no hint of the true size of the outbreak can get out. Out on the streets though many people are well aware of the extent of the problem. The Army and Police are hopelessly outnumbered. Redneck groups and



local gangs are having a field day killing zombies but they are also outnumbered.

A news crew at one of the local TV stations is filming the truth of the outbreak but their reporting is being squashed in the interest of National Security. Sherri's dream is to front a major news story for the network. Torch, the cameraman, wants to produce that magic piece of film that everyone will remember, like the film of the Hindenburg disaster. They won't remember him but his film will live forever.

"Not only are we lucky enough to witness the end of humanity but we've got the means to record it for posterity". OK, Torch sometimes hits the recreational pharmaceuticals and doesn't always make sense.

The team is out gathering what real news it can but it is not going to be broadcast unless someone can take over the control room, interrupt the endless feed of propaganda and reruns and substitute their live reporting.

Feeding The Masses is quite a good end of the world film, with a credible plot, brief moments of humour and good acting. It doesn't concentrate on splatter to the exclusion of dramatic values, but there is enough gore as part of the plot to keep you happy.



Creature From The Hillbilly Lagoon (2005)

This is the sort of film that gives B grade movies a bad name. It is clichéd, poorly acted and yes, you have seen it all before. Adding hillbillys and topless girls and gay references simply can't save this turkey. The evil genetics corporation is hiring local rednecks to illegally dump toxic genetic waste into the river. One of the fish evolves into a man-eating fishy monster. It starts eating the local rednecks so at least the film has one socially redeeming feature. Oh, the monster's headgear is pretty good, too. That's about all, though.

Listening to actors trying to put on down-south drawls is painful. Watching them try to act is worse. Admittedly the script doesn't leave them much to work with. It's just very, very bad.

Necroville (2007)

Now this is more like it. The town is infested with undead and Jack and Alex work for a firm that specialises in removing zombies, vampires and loud college parties. They are pretty good at their job but Jack's demanding girlfriend Penny does not approve.

Now her old boyfriend Clark is back in town. He is an arch-vampire, he hates Jack, and he wants Penny back. He is also a very bad DJ at





the local disco. There will have to be a showdown between the two and it won't be as simple as blasting zombies. Even with Alex at his back Jack is outclassed, but Alex has a plan – gross, but it could just work. There's plenty of gore, lots of funny moments, and heaps of zombies to be slaughtered. If you have to do a zombie film these days, this is how to do it.

Splatter Disco (2007)

This one is not too bad, mostly because of the odd people who inhabit the disco. The Council is trying to close down the Den O' Iniquity disco on moral grounds and someone is murdering the patrons and staff. That should be a good hint to go somewhere else but as one of the patron's points out, where else can you go dressed as small furry animals and spank each other? Or roll yourself up in a piece of carpet and let people walk on you?

There isn't all that much splatter actually, but there are a few nicely done shots that aren't too over the top. There is even some quite decent music. It's worth a look.

The set is nicely presented with good clean transfers and we owe Shock-O-Rama a vote of thanks for keeping the films from vanishing into obscurity.



Ghost Machine Anchor Bay Entertainment R4 DVD



The British Army is trying out a cool new toy, an enhanced virtual reality military combat simulator. It is being tested and demonstrated to a group of SAS soldiers by Tom and Vic. They decide to borrow some of the equipment for an unauthorised weekend of gaming and drugs with a couple of buddies. The site where they set up is an old Military Prison where post 9/11 captives were sent for interrogation. Some did not survive the experience.

The female ghost or spirit or whatever of one of the dead detainees, a woman who hacked into computers to raise funds to support the terrorists, still haunts the prison. It manages to find its way inside the VR simulator where it starts a murderous rampage on the other temporary occupants.

A vicious SAS sergeant, Taggart, was an interrogator (read: torturer) in the prison and was responsible for the woman's death. He is now in charge of the SAS squad undergoing the simulator training. When he realises some of the equipment is missing he tracks it down to the prison. He enters the simulator himself and immediately attracts the wrath of the murdered girl's ghost. Inside the simulator she has more powers than the sim's programmers and can reprogram the locations at will. Tom can't shut down the simulation while there are people "inside" so he must wait helplessly as the girl's revenge is played out. He is also more than a little proud of being able to trap a spirit inside his programming. The body count mounts up. Although the action keeps the plot moving, it must be said that some of the characters are little more than cardboard cut-outs with no character development, and I had expected better from a British film. Still, it's a good enough piece of drama with some interesting ideas.



The Haunting in Connecticut Roadshow R4 DVD

I have always been a sucker for ghost stories, from the most ludicrous to the supposedly “real”. The claims to “real story” status in these films always annoys me but that’s another story !

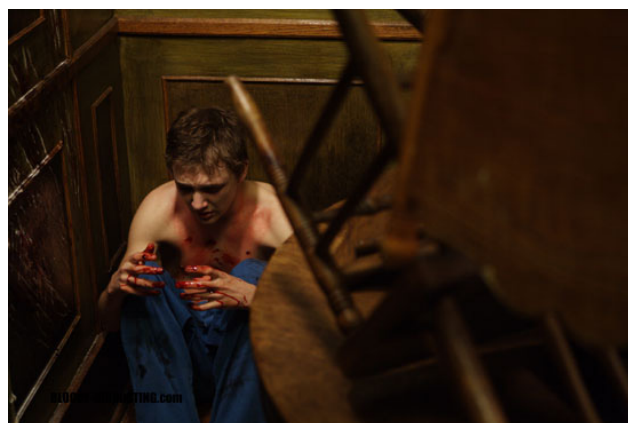


This is the latest ghost story based on a “true story” and while it has at its heart a plot which has been repeated time and time again it does do it rather well.

Matt is suffering from cancer and the long trip for treatment each day is taking its toll on his family. They decide to rent an old Victorian home close to the hospital which is surprisingly economical compared to those around it. While his mother Sara is made aware of its strange past, she doesn’t think much of it until unexplained events begin to occur as soon as they move in.

Matt is plagued by violent and tormented visions of a young boy who seems to have acted as a spirit medium for the original owners of the house. He finds it difficult to take these nightmares seriously as he is on a cocktail of meds and cannot be sure if it is just the treatment. He is also loathe to discuss it with his doctor since he is part of a clinical trial and doesn’t want to risk his place. However as time progresses his mental state starts to deteriorate more and more.

When the family discovers that the house was originally a funeral parlour and the ghostly epi-

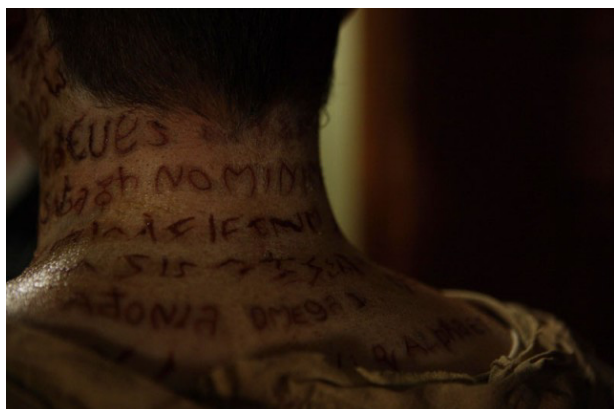


Matt is plagued with visions and nightmares

sodes begin to increase the truth about the house becomes clear. It seems that Jonah, the young boy was not only a spirit medium but a vessel by which dark forces could enter the world and now he has found a means to return.

When Matts mental condition reaches such a level he needs to be hospitalized for psychiatric treatment, the onslaught really begins.

The Haunting is an interesting tale in that it uses the emotional story of the Campbell’s and their attempt to save the life of their son as its heart and this takes it somewhat outside the realm of traditional ghost stories. Combining excellent special effects, a solid ghost story and a compassionate tale of suffering and disease makes it an intriguing tale. The constant shocks, ghosts in mirrors and windows, bodies and so on all help to create a dark and edgy mood. However, the fact that the haunted house story has been done so many times before does not help in the originality stakes but ultimately it does provide an enjoyable if not a little predictable horror experience.



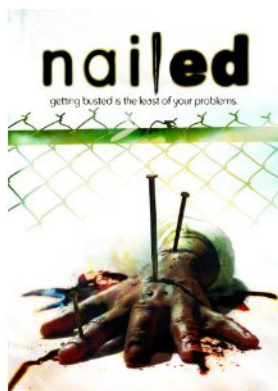
The dead communicate



The dead return

Nailed
Image Entertainment
R1 DVD

Nailed is a very surprising low budget horror film, while most indie horror releases tend to focus on gore this is a film high in tension and psychological terror. The violence and gore is present but inferred and character development is the prime focus.



The film opens as a crime drama. Keller and Scott (Charles Porter and Sam Sarpong) are on their way to a budding career as bag men. They run drugs for a local dealer and bring him back the cash. But this time they are in for a shock, their buyer is a cop and they are about to be busted. Things however don't go as plan and a cop gets shot, Scott is wounded and they are on the run. They see an old house and they think it is somewhere good to hide; but this is a very bad move. The movement from a crime, even gang/drugs tale to a supernatural story is smooth and very effective. It works well as you do not expect it and as strange things happen you get quite a start.

The house is occupied by two rather strange people; Adam a carer who seems to have a malicious streak and a man wrapped in bandages who seems in constant pain. As Adam treats Scott's wounds he plays mind games with them but there seems to be something else going on in the house. Both Keller and Scott begin to have strange visions involving a ghostly woman. The ghost is well presented nearly having a Japanese horror style look and with little funds horror elements are brought into the tale. The psychological aspects of the story include the tension between young and cocky Scott and the brutal Keller add a further dimension as does the final revelations about how Adam knows Keller and what the house is really all about.

The story is intriguing as it cuts back and forward in time, has elements of voodoo and the supernatural and a surprise ending. Considering the nature of the conclusion the film could have easily opted for graphic gore but instead used mood to tell the tale.

For a low budget horror this is surprisingly original and well worth seeing.

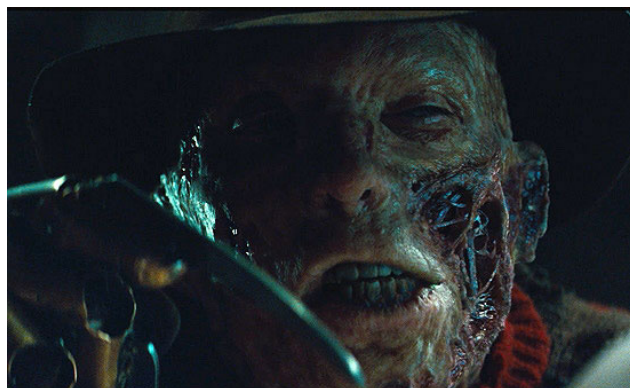
Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)
New Line Cinema
Film Release

Nightmare on Elm Street was an instant success in 1984 and gave birth to one of the most successful horror franchises. Robert Englund with his trademark wit played a child killer who is killed by a group of vigilante parents. He returns in their children's dreams and takes bloody revenge. While the original series are a major success many film critics, myself included, were a little surprised by the transformation of child killer into campy and witty anti-hero. As the series progressed he became a perversely comic horror figure with even children running around with Freddy masks and gloves.



The new Nightmare on Elm Street is a much darker vision. While taking inspiration from the original by Wes Craven, director Samuel Bayer working from a script by Wesley Strick and Eric Heisserer tries to capture the essence of the Freddy story. This time Freddy is not a quick witted anti-hero but a child molester and abuser. He was a gardener at a pre-school and kept a den under the building where he sexually abused his victims. When the parents realize something is up, they decide to take the law in their own hands and burn him to death. They cover up all the details of what has occurred and hope their children will not remember. When they do not find the hidden den they wonder whether they killed an innocent man and try and sustain a conspiracy of silence around Krueger and the events at the pre-school.

Years later the youngsters and now teenagers and have very violent dreams of a man with a





burnt face and a stylized gardening fork which has become a bladed glove. As they begin to recover memories of their childhood abuse, they are unsure about what they all mean. At first their parents deny any knowledge of the events and the teens begin to think that their parents killed an innocent man based on the hearsay evidence they collected from the teens when they were kids. However, as the evidence mounts they return to the pre-school and uncover the secret room and the truth becoming shockingly clear.

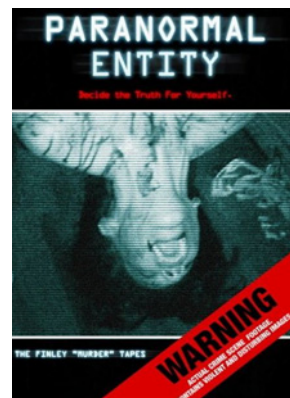
The twist in the story in relation to child abuse, repressed memories and the parents vigilantism gives the film a little more relevance in the modern period.

The battle is now on between Freddy in his dream world and Nancy and Kyle who must bring him back to the real world and kill him once again. Freddy is played by Jackie Earle Haley who offers a far more menacing version of Freddy than the original.

There is no room for campy innuendoes here, he is a sick puppy and this is made very clear. Certainly the background to his character takes away from the supernaturalness of his role, but it also gives a stronger sense of reality to the film.

There are set-pieces which just seem to be in the film as a homage to the original (such as the body bag scene) and these seem a big incongruous and could have been omitted to make the film a tighter work of horror. At the same time I think this is an interesting new take on an old series which while not perfect is well worth seeing.

Paranormal Entity 2010 Peacock Films



I am not sure what to make of this film. On the one hand it's a blatant rip-off of Paranormal Activity, but on the other hand it is in many ways better done. It seems to have been made on a higher budget and the story is a little less disjointed. There are now three victims instead of two so the story (only slightly changed from Paranormal Activity) is a bit easier to follow.

There is a small sexual element introduced that I think makes it more believable. Instead of the demon always having been there in the girl's life, we now have a more rational explanation as to how and why it crossed over from the other side. To counter this the film looks just a little too slick sometimes and loses out on the sheer raw terror of Paranormal Activity, although it does come close.

For those who haven't seen Paranormal Activity, the plot of Paranormal Entity goes something like this. A family of three is being terrorised by a presence that they think may be the spirit of their dead father, but this belief soon changes. The presence has become infatuated with the teenage girl. It starts with the usual bumps in the night and poltergeist activity but grows worse as the demon grows in power. The girl feels a presence sometimes at night that holds her down in bed and is on top of her. The demon resents being filmed at night and starts to fight back. It also has a dislike for the Christian cross hanging above the girl's bed.

If you don't mind watching a rip-off plot you will probably enjoy Paranormal Entity.



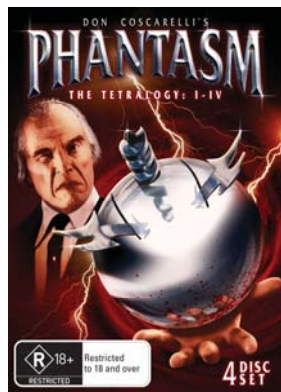
Phantasm Tetralogy Icon Films R4 DVD

Phantasm (originally released as *Never Dead* in Australia) is a low-budget sci-fi horror film released in 1979. The film was directed, written, photographed, co-produced and edited by Don Coscarelli. It introduced The Tall Man, quite a startling and innovative horror character. The Tall Man is a malevolent undertaker who takes the bodies of the deceased and somehow transforms them into dwarf zombies who do his bidding. The film mixes cult, science fiction and horror elements in quite a unique manner and was highly successful. It spawned three sequels *Phantasm II*, *Phantasm III: Lord of the Dead*, *Phantasm IV: Oblivion*.

Phantasm was released as a DVD by MGM in the U.S in 1999 and then re-released on DVD by Anchor Bay Entertainment on April 10, 2007. A special edition was released in the U.K. including all four films in a collectible sphere. A full set of all four films have been released by Hopscotch films in Australia in 2010.

After the death of their parents Jody Pearson is raising his 13 year old brother Mike in a small town disturbed by the mysterious deaths of its citizens. Reggie, who works as the local ice cream vendor and provides a certain comic element to the film, is a good friend to the boys and believes that the local mortician is the cause of the towns trouble. The mortician is a strange character; he is called The Tall Man due to his extreme height and the strange large steps he takes when he walks. He has a menacing presence and creates a dark mood whenever he enters a scene.

Mike decides to investigate the funeral home and finds that The Tall Man is digging up the dead and turning them into zombie dwarves. When Mike, his brother and Reggie investigate further they find a strange white room in which some sort of transporter is in operation. It seems that The Tall Man is creating slaves from the bodies of the dead and shipping them back to his home planet for menial labour. This strange combination of science fiction and horror is what makes *Phantasm* (and its sequels) so fascinating. Another is the strange weapons The Tall Man unleashes on those on intrude on



his domain, spinning silver balls with sharp blades which cut into anything they land on. These balls provide some of the more gore ridden aspects of the series including heads being bored into and hands being ripped apart. The violence of many of the early films caused headaches for the censors and in some localities the first uncut editions appeared only with the DVD release.

Phantasm II continues on from the first film expanding and refining the tale with loads more action and some excellent horror sequences. By this stage the series had certainly become a cult classic. The 1994 sequel *Phantasm III: Lord of the Dead* pushes the horror envelope with lots more gore and emphasizes the sci fi element with the dwarves now called Lurkers and the spheres Sentinels. There is also a more comprehensive exploration of how humans are transformed into Lurkers with Mike himself being transformed into a Lurker, but one who is on the side of good and working to destroy The Tall Man.

The final film brings together all the elements of the series even including a rollicking time travel sequence.

Phantasm is an unusual horror sci fi franchise in that while it was clearly not as successful as *The Nightmare on Elm Street* or *Halloween*, it developed a very devoted cult following. The Tall Man is a truly impressive horror character, Angus Scrimm has a powerful presence and really carries the films, I do not believe any sequel could have been successful with anyone else in his role. While there has been some internet gossip about a further sequel it seems unlikely. The first three films all ended with someone being pulled through a mirror or pane of glass to represent the continuation of the tale, this did not happen at the conclusion of the fourth film. The final film really did tie all the ends together and it seems unlikely it could be taken further, but one can never tell !



Sea Beast
Sony Home
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Overall this film looks like a cross between *Predator* and *Creature From The Black Lagoon*, but its strength is in its tight scripting, good acting and some really good CGI. Add some spectacular scenery from the American north-west and you have a gripping little monster film.



The plot is simple but works well - a mutated semi-transparent amphibious sea monster is eating people. The first one to see it, fisherman Will McKenna, is laughed at by the locals. As more people disappear or are found in partly eaten bits it becomes clear that he may have been right.

We have the compulsory kids holidaying on a nearby island, the grizzled old fisherman who isn't afraid of anything from the sea, and the usual host of people who have "fishfood" written on their foreheads.

We also have the attractive marine biologist to explain the what and how of the monster. Let the slaughter begin.

The monster appears to be almost immune to gunfire and all the other conventional killing methods.

About all that seems to work in the beginning is a well-swung axe, and who wants to get that close to a monster with a powerful ten-foot



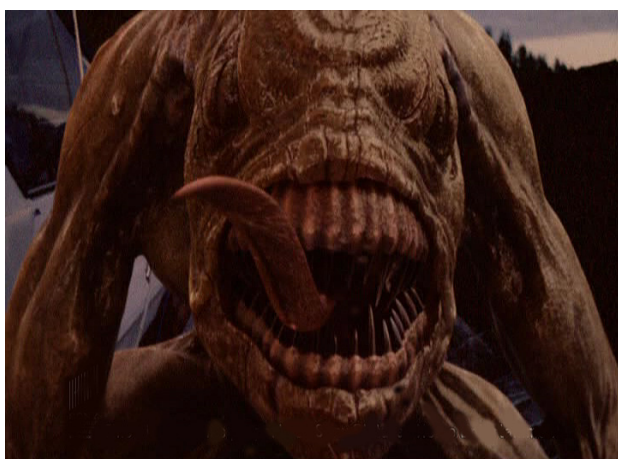
tongue that can drag you right into its mouth?

Matters take a turn for the worse when they find that the monster is female and has laid a clutch of eggs somewhere nearby. Its young are infesting the islands and are just as dangerous as Mother. Now they must destroy Mother, her young and her eggs.

Although the plot is conventional the film gains strength from the sweeping scenery shots – it doesn't look like it has been made in a studio with a truckload of rental plants.

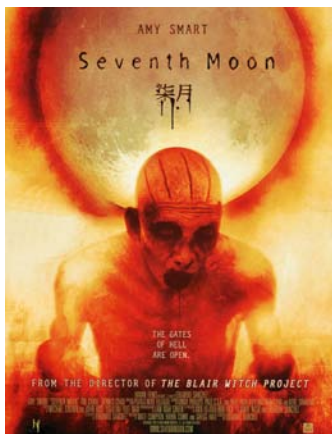
The CGI gives one of the best monsters since the Korean film *The Host*, and the monster has more than a passing resemblance to that creature.

It may be derivative but I quite enjoyed the film. There seems to be a revival in monster films lately, and there should be more as good as this one.



Seventh Moon
Sony
R4 DVD

A hungry ghost is a spirit that "eats" the emotions of living humans or whose actions are driven by emotions leftover from its previous life. In *Seventh Moon* hungry ghosts are depicted as able to cross over into the world of the living during the Chinese Hungry Ghost festival.



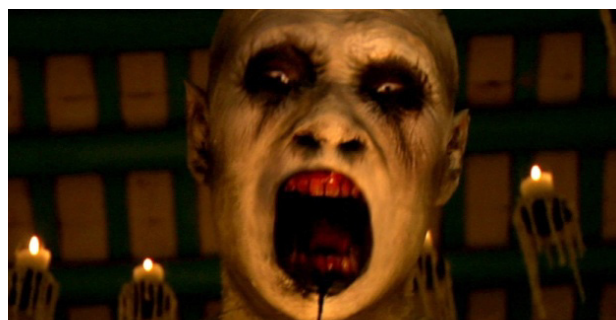
A small village finds itself haunted by an especially virulent group of ghosts which demand the sacrifice of one of their number each year. In any attempt to "protect their own" they encourage Ping to set up a tour company whereby he can bring outsiders to the village and hence fill their quota without diminishing their own numbers.

Some nine years after his first hit, *The Blair Witch Project*, writer/director Eduardo Sanchez has tapped into Chinese mythology to offer us *Seventh Moon*. It centres on two newlyweds Melissa and Yul who travel to the countryside to meet Yul's Grandmother and the problems they encounter when Ping, their guide, decides to take them to his own village to solve his yearly "hungry ghost problem".

The film uses much of the same techniques as with *The Blair Witch Project* which will endear it to some and not to others. The handheld camera is not quite used as much and the look is far



Melissa and Yul encounter a victim of the Hungry Ghosts



The hungry dead

more professional, the budget is higher and hence the special effects are also much better.

This is an enjoyable horror film which combines an eastern sensibility with a Western cinematography. It is a bit short on plot, but the characters are believable enough and it does work as a ghost tale with a bit extra. The film emphasizes mood and suspense rather than plot and with the addition of an excellent score does create a very dark and foreboding mood. The way in which a horror tale is given a different texture through the imagery of a Chinese folk festival is innovative and intriguing.

In the first scenes there is even some attempt to explore the relationship between the average Chinese villager and tourists who come to gawk at their traditions.

The hungry ghosts are impressive especially in that you don't see them clearly (at least until later in the film) so your imagination fills in the gaps.

The Seventh Moon is an interesting take on the Asian horror genre and while not something you would watch again and again is an enjoyable enough experience to be make it worth the effort of getting hold of.



Chinese Folk Festival

**The Grudge:
White Ghost and Black
Ghost
Madman
R4 DVD**



One of the most successful J-horror series of all times was *Ju-on* or *The Grudge*. Just when you thought nothing more could be added to the series, along comes a double bill which knocks your socks off. It is surprising really, considering how many J-Horror sequels have become rather moribund and in many ways the genre has been pushed to its very limit when it comes to originality.

While the original *Ju-on* director was not directly involved, he supervised the production and hence his influence is felt throughout. The directors of *White Ghost* and *Black Ghost* are Ryuta Miyake and Mari Asato.

White Ghost begins as a series of seemingly unconnected ghostly tales. They are short, direct and haunting but are somewhat jarring as they do not make a lot of sense. However as the tales continue you notice connections here and there and slowly a deep sense of dread begins to build. I love the way you need to think through the links in each of the tales until the final instalment when all is finally revealed.

Each of the characters is related to others in the tales and it all begins and ends with the cursed house and a very dysfunctional family.

When a new family moves into the house the resonances of the past move into the present and an adopted son begins to transform into an abuser and then a killer. When he fails the bar exam, he slaughters all the members of the household and hangs himself. As he died he



made a tape recording but on the cassette is not just his own voice but the voice of Mirai, the youngest member of the family. Her soul seeks revenge from beyond the grave and affects all who hear the tape.

In *Black Ghost* Yuko, a nurse, is left in charge of a young girl named Fukie who seems to be suffering from a large cyst. Soon, however, strange things begin to occur as the cyst is actually an unborn child fuelled for hatred and contempt for mankind. As the baby grows everyone around her is cursed, Fukie's father goes insane after a bloody murder. The baby's powers are only just kept in check by the psychic forces of Fukie's younger sister but even they are not strong enough to keep the growing enmity in check. After an exorcism fails all hell breaks loose, literally.

These are surprising and refined developments of the *Ju-on* storyline with interesting twisted, excellent suspense and lots of terror. It is surprising how much tension can be created with such little gore and with a minimum of special effects. It is very impressive to see what can be done on an obviously limited budget but with lots of creativity.

Highly recommended.



Metamorphosis
MTI Home Video
R1 DVD

Not another vampire movie? Well, yes, but a very good one. With actors like Christopher Lambert it carries a higher quality of acting than usual. The story also delves into the legend of Countess Elisabeth Bathory, a Hungarian noblewoman who was reputed to believe that she could keep her youthful looks by drinking and bathing in the blood of virgin girls.



The film starts with the Palatine Thurzo, a local high official of the church, invading the Bathory castle. The Countess is walled up in a tower of the building. Her daughter, however, escapes but only after her mother curses Thurzo and his progeny to all die unnatural deaths. She also gives her daughter the vampire ability and immortality, so her daughter can hunt down the Thurzos and their descendants.

We now move forward to modern times. A group of three young American tourists is trying to get to the old castle, now a monastery. Keith is writing a book about the Bathorys. With him is J.J., the compulsory annoying, crass and insensitive type so popular as the sidekick in American films, and J.J.'s girlfriend Kim. Along the way they meet Elizabeth (Countess Bathory's immortal daughter, in case you couldn't see it coming). She has just attacked the last surviving Thurzo (Christopher Lambert) and was ready to rip his throat out just as the tourists arrive. Leaving the job unfinished, she has unwittingly turned Thurzo into a vampire. She and Keith fall in love. Elizabeth also wants to go to the old family castle, now a monastery, where she knows Thurzo will be hiding. When they reach



the castle, all are in danger as Thurzo's strength and new-found vampire skills will lead to their deaths unless Elizabeth can help them.

The legend is skilfully developed throughout the film. The supernatural aspects are integrated in a believable way as recounted by an old priest. The film also mocks the religious trappings overlaid on the vampire legend – Thurzo is not affected by “two crossed sticks of wood” or holy water. He is no respecter of priests or nuns. He can punch his way right through a Bible. He can, however, be killed by the traditional wooden stake. Even here the movie legend is corrected – the local people would drive a stake through the heart of a corpse to stop it rising again if they suspected it was a vampire. Getting close enough to a vampire to kill it with a stake would seem unlikely. Removing the silly trappings that have grown up around the legend seems to give it extra credibility.

A lot of this is due to Hungarian writer Tibor Fonyodi's passion for the history, culture and paranormal phenomena of his country. Instead of the usual superficial treatment so often given to vampire stories he shows us some of the Hungarian culture that led to the legend. The cinematography adds to the effect – castles and monasteries perched high on rocky cliffs, old buildings that ARE old buildings, not film sets, and crumbling peasant villages.

The sensitive and sensible treatment given to the legend makes this film stand out in the genre.



The Wizard of Gore
Reel DVD
R4 DVD

This is a remake of a 1970s film by Herschell Gordon Lewis.

Lewis is remembered as the very first filmmaker to exploit the world of gore in film. He originally made exploitation films but when these started to become ho-hum he went on to create the very first cult gore film *Flesh Feast*, following these with *2000 Maniacs* and *The Wizard of Gore*. Lewis combined a sense of flair with an eye for exploitation and lots of violence and gore.

This is a remake made with a strong sense of homage to the original.

Edward Bigelow is a reporter running and producing his own small newspaper covering the underground world in Los Angeles. He finds out about a magic act that is supposed to be a cut above the average, so with his girlfriend in tow he watches a performance. He is impressed. Montag the Magnificent (played by a demented Crispin Glover) has an act that involves picking a random girl from the audience, stripping her, then killing her in a gruesome manner. All the while Montag is running a continuous patter about the nature of reality and your own perception of it. Just as the audience is about to leave, scared and repulsed, he reveals the girl to the audience perfectly unharmed.

Bigelow visits the show again and the same thing happens to a different girl who is killed in a different way, then is revealed unharmed on stage once more. The only jarring note is that the girls are turning up dead the next day, suffering the same sort of injuries that Montag inflicted on them during his stage show.



Bigelow is suspicious. Is Montag working some sort of mass hypnosis or drugging the audience somehow? Could it be just coincidence? As more girls die Bigelow starts to question his own sanity. Could he really be murdering them? He has strange memories, but gaps are appearing in his real memory.

His girlfriend, far more practical, takes a computer and miniature camera to the show and records what Montag is really saying to the audience. The results are terrifying but as Bigelow closes in on Montag, so Montag is closing in on Bigelow.

The film is thankfully not as much of a gorefest as it could have been. I think too much gore would have detracted from the plot, which is strong enough to stand by itself as a masterpiece of terror. There are some odd bits in the film, such as why Bigelow seems to be stuck in a 1930s timewarp in his clothing and dislike of modern electronics, but apart from being slightly confusing they don't detract from the film. It is a superb piece of suspense and horror as it is.



Fish Story Third Window Films R2 DVD

Japanese subtitled in English

An unusual film, this one gives us segments of a story that don't at first seem interrelated. It doesn't all come together until the last few minutes.

A Fish Story is one that grows bigger with each telling. In the film it is also the title of a song by a Japanese would-be band of rockers who are a bit ahead of their time. Although the band fails the song *Fish Story* lives on in underground cult music, never quite forgotten.

Through the decades it touches many lives. Its odd lyrics can be interpreted any way you like and there is a phrase in the song for anyone who cares to try to relate their lives to it. Each person's story is left unfinished, implying that there is more to the story and more yet to come. And so there is, for each of them.

We move forward to the present time when a huge asteroid is about to hit the Earth. Most people have gone to higher ground. The cult loonies are fighting each other to establish who predicted Armageddon first.

Others are relying on some Champion of Justice or giant robot to save the world – too many superhero shows on TV. Others are fatalistically enjoying their last few days alive.

In Japan the tidal wave will probably be higher than Mt Fuji – it looks like Japan will be gone



from the face of the Earth. Anything the tidal wave doesn't destroy will probably be destroyed by the volcanoes that will open up when the surface is cracked open. Any survivors from that will have to face a "nuclear winter" as the dust in the atmosphere cuts sunlight to the surface and it becomes impossible to grow crops.

Attempts to plant atomic bombs on the asteroid have failed and it seems the Earth is doomed. The *Fish Story* song is the only thing that can save the planet.

The film starts out seeming quite strange as all the disjointed stories develop. Stay with it – it's worth it in the end.

Third Windows Films

Web: <http://thirdwindowfilms.com>



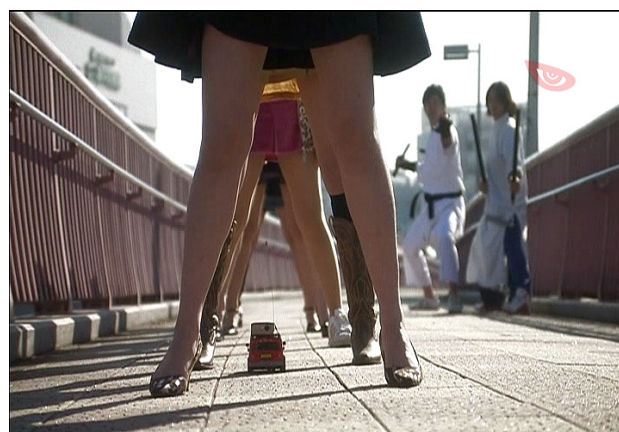
Love Exposure **Madman** **R4 DVD**

English subtitles

This is one of the strangest, most perverse love stories I have seen in a long time. It is about Jesus freaks – devout Catholics but the sort who use Christianity to justify all sorts of perversions and distortions like incest and panty fetishes. It is hard to describe the film's underlying motifs so I will just run through the plot – that's weird enough.

Chapter 1 introduces Yu, a young boy whose hyper-religious mother is dying. She makes him promise that he will marry a woman like the Virgin Mary. His father Tetsu becomes a Catholic minister, a gentle and understanding man. One day a woman named Kaori comes into his congregation. She is a shallow self-centred amoral slut and she soon sets her sights on Yu's father. She becomes a Christian to get closer to Tetsu but does not change her wild lifestyle – after all, she now only has to confess her sins to be forgiven. Tetsu rejects her – he is a priest after all and sworn now to celibacy. Following the rejection Tetsu's performance starts to slide downhill. He becomes obsessive about his son's sins. Yu can't remember committing any, but his father takes this as a sign that he is forgetting his sins and this, too, is a sin. He bullies his son until Yu has only one choice left – he must commit sin so he can confess to his father so his father can forgive him. On this basis both will be happy.

But what sin should Yu commit? He tries shoplifting and street brawling but he finds that he excels at Tosatsu. Translated this means "to steal with a camera" In practical terms it is tak-

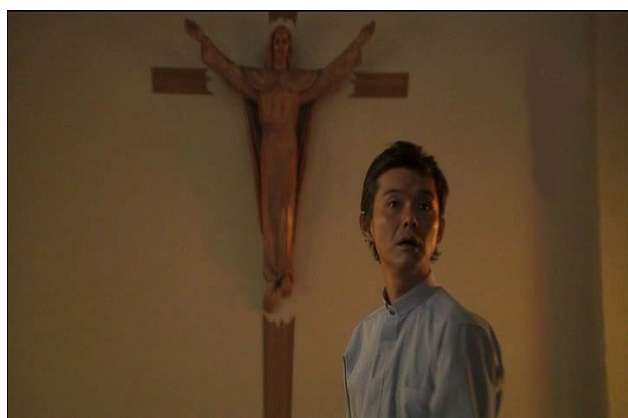


ing surreptitious photos up girls' dresses. He and his friends have weekly meetings to decide who has the best panty photo. He loses a dare at one of these meetings and must dress up like a schoolgirl, walk through town and kiss the girl who looks most like his beloved Virgin Mary.

As they go through town they come across a girl being hassled by a group of youths. He joins in to protect her but finds to his surprise that she is a pretty good street brawler herself. Then in a moment of divine revelation her skirt is blown upwards, flashing her panties, and he recognises his Virgin Mary in the girl fighting beside him. She in turn sees Yu, dressed as a woman, as the girlfriend she wants. Yu has his first erection, which fortunately the girl doesn't notice. He introduces himself to her as "Miss Scorpion" before being dragged away by his friends.

Chapter 2 introduces Yoko, the street fighting girl. She is the daughter of Kaori. She is disgusted with her mother's behaviour and constant string of boyfriends. She was molested by one of them. She has grown up tough, independent and a manhater. One day she turns to Jesus. He sounds like someone she could respect. "Jesus, I approve of you as the only cool man besides Kurt Cobain." She is worried that her feelings for "Miss Scorpion" may mean she is a lesbian, but goes to church to thank Jesus for giving her the friend she wanted.

Kaori is tired of her current boyfriend and decides to get back together with the priest Tetsu. He will not have his life and his son's life destroyed again and he rejects her but after a nearly suicidal car chase he takes her back. Yu can feel Hell coming back into his life. Yoko, however, refuses – she doesn't want another "family" since her family experiences so far have been negative.





A whole bunch of suckers.

Meanwhile Yu searches for his Virgin Mary the only way he can – by taking many more panty photos in the hope that one will reveal his Maria as he remembered her in the brawl. Then the miracle happens. Yoko's mother moves closer to the church. Yoko in turn must move into a new school. She is put in the same class as Yu. He recognises her instantly but she still hates men and longs for her female friend Miss Scorpion. Yu is having serious erection problems at the thought of her. He must tell her who he really is, but how do you confess to the girl you love that you are a pervert who likes to photograph girls panties and cross dress as well? And all the while sporting a huge erection?

Before he can tell her, the situation gets worse. His father announces that he is going to leave the priesthood and marry Kaori. Yu and Yoko will then be brother and sister and any further relationship will be out of the question.

The whole family is under surveillance by a group of girls from the new cult "The Church Of Zero". The girls' leader, Aye, has the idea that she can bring in converts more efficiently if they can first convert Tetsu. Convert the man, then use him to convert his family, then use them to convert his congregation. This should bring in



I walked like a cool chick.



the large amounts of donations that the cult is after.

Can an innocent young Catholic cross-dressing pervert with a panty fetish find true happiness in an incestuous relationship with a street brawling lesbian and at the same time spoil the cult's evil plot?.

Chapter 3. Aya makes her move on Yoko by pretending she is Miss Scorpion. In a mock attack on the school she routs a bunch of "gangsters" and wins Yoko's admiration. Tetsu's resignation horrifies his Bishop - how can Tetsu place mere love ahead of God? Only Yu is suspicious. But then Aye springs her trap to completely discredit him. He loses his family, his place at school and the girl he loves. They are completely alienated from him and join the cult as Aye planned.

Only Yu's friends stand by him, and one of them guesses correctly that the Zero cult may be involved. What can Yu do about it? He stages a murderous attack on the cult headquarters. This doesn't win Yoko to him but it certainly gets the attention of the police and they break up the cult.

Chapter 4 brings the aftermath of Yu's attack. He has lost it completely and is in an asylum, now convinced he is Miss Scorpion. Yoko is staying with relatives. Yu's father and his girlfriend are in rehabilitation to deprogram them from the cult. Can Yu be saved from a lifetime of madness?

The film leaves you in a state of shock. It's certainly not your average love story.

The film leaves you in a state of shock. It's certainly not your average love story.

Guns & Talks
Third Window Films
R2 DVD

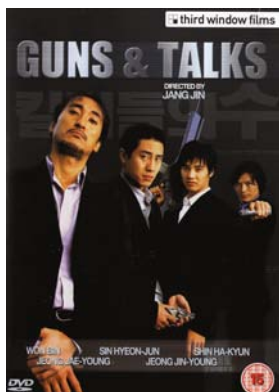
Korean with English subtitles

This unusual film from director Jang Jin is a little different from the usual run of Korean gangster films. Our heroes, if that's the right word, are a group of four assassins for hire. Their speciality is killing their victim in whatever way the client wants, from a straight hit to a more public execution. They are helped by Uncle Joo, an expert in making the special gadgets they need and supplying all sorts of illegal weaponry.

Things go wrong when they are hired to kill a young pregnant woman. The client, the woman's husband, forgot to tell them she was pregnant and Sang-Yun, the gunman allocated the job takes pity on her then falls in love with her.

An intelligent and cunning police officer, Detective Cho, is also on their tail using clues from a previous hit on one of his informants. Gradually the police are closing in. Officer Cho is following them and visits the young woman to warn her she is in danger. She asks him to warn off her husband. Both Cho and Sang-Yun approach the husband one day. Sang-Yun apologises for not completing the job. When the husband calls him incompetent he beats the husband up and tells him to leave the woman alone. Shortly after this, Cho finds the husband and also warns him off. Then beats him up as well.

Another of the gunmen has fallen in love with a schoolgirl who wants them to kill her English teacher, who has got her pregnant. The group



is starting to develop internal tensions but their most important job is yet to come. They must assassinate a leading actor in a stage performance of Hamlet with thousands of people watching.

Detective Cho is also having trouble with one of the local crime lords. He wants the man dead, but policemen just don't do that sort of thing so he works out a way of tricking the assassins into doing it for him.

It is an intelligent film although rather brutal. There are enough flashes of humour to keep it from getting too dark, and enough action to keep it moving.

Extras are the usual "Making of", a Bon Jovi music video and the usual trailers.

The Last Battle
Madman
R4 DVD



Madman has recently been distributing many of the films of French director Luc Besson. I have come to like his work. Many of his films are a conventional genre but with his own personal twist that lifts them above the average. The Last Battle was his first feature film, dating back to 1983, and is so unconventional that it has achieved cult status. It was filmed in black and white, there is no dialogue, the music is minimal and the film raises more questions in the viewer's mind than it answers. The sudden ending seems more like a pause in the plot as it leaves the end of the film open to further development or sequels.

It is set in some post-apocalyptic world where small groups or individuals jealously guard what little they have left. Water is precious, food is disappearing. The survivors have regressed to





almost animal savagery. Even the power of speech has been lost. The Man, otherwise unnamed, is living in a huge ruined building that appears to have once been an office block. It is now surrounded by desert and he has built an ultralight aircraft in which to escape and look for company. Another group has settled nearby in a group of abandoned cars and has their own small water supply, so they are not moving on. The Man steals a battery from one of their vehicles to start his plane and escapes just in time.

When he runs out of fuel he is near an almost abandoned village. The only village inhabitants are a doctor and a man known as The Brute who is trying kill the doctor for his food and anything else of value. The Brute attacks The Man and The Man is saved by the doctor. While convalescing he finds the doctor also has a woman – his wife? his daughter? – locked up in a small room where he feeds her every day. Why she is captive we don't know. He becomes infatuated with her even though he has never seen her. Meanwhile, though, they must fight off the constant attacks by The Brute.

It is one of those films where you go away



vaguely dissatisfied that there was not more, even though you know it still wouldn't answer the questions in your mind. You can let your imagination run riot, but you will still be no closer to making sense of the film's plot because there is no sense – just the constant battle for survival in a world that is no longer rational.

Mother Eastern Eye (2010) R4 DVD

*Korean subtitled in clear
English*

Director Bong Joon-Ho has taken a change of direction after his successful monster movie *The Host* to give us this story of the seedy side of life in a Korean village.



Do-Joon is a village lad, slightly retarded. His mother is an unlicensed local herbalist and acupuncturist, although some of her remedies appear to be a bit dodgy. She is obsessively protective of Do-Joon, to the point that you wonder if she isn't a little off-balance herself.

I wondered if part of Do-Joon's mental problems came from the herbs that his mother keeps feeding him, but more of that later. Do-Joon has an anger problem and one day when he is hit by a passing car he loses control and attacks the car and its occupants. This brings him to the attention of the local police.

When a local girl is found dead with her head bashed in, some questionable evidence links Do-Joon with the murder. The less-than-



interested police think this is enough evidence and arrest him for the murder. Mother won't put up with this. Do-Joon was drunk that night and can't remember anything of his walk home but Mother is convinced of his innocence and sets out to find the murderer.

The first suspect is Do-Joon's best friend who was supposed to meet him that night but didn't turn up. She puts him in to the police but he has an alibi for that night. He does, however, help Mother by rounding up some people who knew the dead girl well and he beats information out of them.

It seems the victim was not as innocent as everyone thought. She has been a local prostitute for many years and her customers have included some of the more important people in town. She had a habit of taking their picture on her mobile phone and the search is on for the phone which probably contains a picture of her murderer.

On a steady herb-free diet in prison Do-Joon's memory is improving. Although the details of that night are still unclear he is remembering other things, such as his mother's attempt to poison him when he was five. He disowns his



After I got beaten, I remembered.

mother.

Although her world is starting to fall apart, Mother perseveres with her investigation. She is actually making some headway when a witness to the killing appears. At the same time, Do-Joon's memory returns. The results are not quite what she wanted. How far will Mother go to protect her son? She is faced with decisions no mother should have to make.

The film is a first-class murder mystery and loses nothing through being in Korean. The pace is maintained right through the film and at the end there are some savage little twists to the plot. Kim Hye-Ja is highly skilled actress and it will be hard to forget her stern Mother figure striding purposefully through the village on her latest mission.

Won Bin plays Do-Joon with just the right amount of befuddlement to make him a sympathetic character and to leave open the question of whether he is really retarded or just over-medicated.

Even the village setting adds its part to the film – it is seedy and rundown and the weather always seems to be raining. Mother is a superb film and will appeal to all mystery fans.

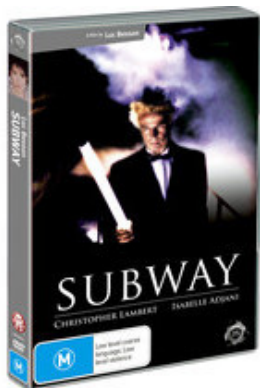
The extras include the usual making of and behind the scenes. There is also an interesting interview with director Bong Joon-Ho regarding the origins of the film. He was struck by Kim Hye-ja's acting skills but her parts were all conventional motherly types.

He wanted to show the other side of motherhood, the darker and more intense side, and she accepted the part.

She said that most young directors had just told her "You know what to do" and she enjoyed a part that was so different and challenging.

Subway
Gaumont
Madman
R4 DVD
Australian Blu Ray

French with English subtitles



Subway is another film by French director Luc Besson and has the characteristic quirkiness of his earlier films. This one dates from 1985, one of his earlier films, and reflects the contrast in lifestyles between the rich and the younger people.

Fred, a happy go lucky young man with a hidden ability for opening safes, was invited to a party by Helena, the trophy wife of a wealthy gangster. Fred was unable to resist the temptation to open their safe and has made off with some compromising documents.

The film opens with a car chase through Paris with the gangster's men in hot pursuit. Fred takes refuge in the Paris Underground stations where he finds a curious range of individuals also living in the old tunnels and offices of the disused parts of the Metro.

There is Big Bill, a massively strong man who works on the underground as a railway ganger and apparently just likes to live near his work. Roller is a bag-snatcher who makes rapid escapes on his roller skates.



They are even fitted with small headlights so he can see where he is going in the darker old tunnels. Fred finds shelter with these two. There is the Florist who is waiting for a chance to run a major holdup. There are also a number of underground musicians who are waiting for some sort of a break in a band. Fred offers to form a band and get them a gig.

As well as the gangster's men, Helena is searching for Fred hoping to ransom the papers back from him. The Police are also looking for the group as they are concerned at the number of the Roller's bag-snatches. Fortunately Helena finds him first and spends the night in their unlikely accommodation. Helena finds the underground life more to her liking and starts to rebel against her gilded cage lifestyle. Although nothing happened between her and Fred her husband believes otherwise and orders his men to find and kill Fred.

Fred keeps faith with the members of the new band and pulls off a holdup, then sets them up on an unused stage in the underground complex for their first gig. They are a success with the commuters. The gunmen, however, have also tracked down Fred.

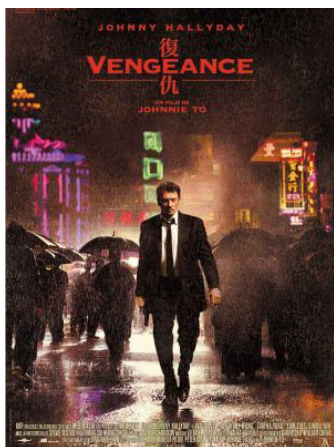
The story finishes abruptly in Besson style with



a lot of questions unanswered and a lot left to the imagination. There are the usual moments of humour, Besson's typically odd characters and a plot that keeps the action coming with very few breaks. You may not follow all of it at first, but it is worth watching.

**Vengeance
Madman
Eastern Eye 2009
R4 DVD**

If you like your gangster films to be clean and with minimal bloodshed this film will not be for you. Director Johnny To has given us a dark, violent film in the old style before the U.S. film industry decided to get all socially responsible.



Costello's daughter is badly injured and her family has been killed in an apparent Triad assassination. Costello, a French chef, was once a gunman in his murky past. He took a bullet in the head and his short term memory loss at times of stress is becoming a major handicap, but he arrives in Macao seeking vengeance.

Although he must take photos of everything to keep his mind refreshed it doesn't affect his old killing skills. He witnesses another gang killing in his hotel and hires those killers to take on his case.

They are initially puzzled by the Frenchman but come to respect him, even to regard him as a sort of friend. This is put to the test when they find that the killers they want are another group controlled by their own boss. Do they cut the



Frenchman loose and become dishonoured, or do they betray their boss and help the Frenchman get his revenge on the man who ordered the death of his family?

With the killers' help Costello is now armed and ready, which is just as well. Mr Fong, the Triad boss, orders the death of the killers. Although they go out in a blaze of glory Costello is left to find and kill Fong by himself.

Despite his constantly failing memory and the injuries he has sustained already, he finds Fong and prepares for his bloody vengeance.

Johnny Hallyday plays the part of Costello with far more style and compassion than you would expect from this sort of film.

The Director gives him room in the script to play out a few human moments and these give us a welcome pause in the almost non-stop action. I felt a certain sympathy for Costello, a handicapped man in a foreign environment trying to do a hard job. His three Chinese compatriots also play their parts well and develop their own personalities.

The fusion between French and Chinese works really well here. As I mentioned before, if you can stand the violence, this is a great film.



**A History of Britain
and The American
Future: A History
Simon Michael
Schama
Roadshow
R4 DVD**

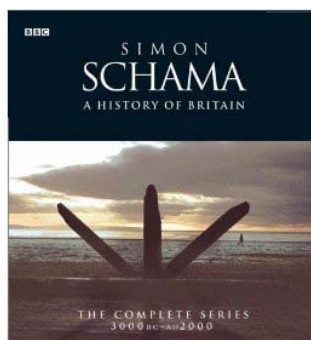
Simon Michael Schama, CBE (born 13 February 1945 in London) is a British historian and art historian, he is a currently professor at Columbia University. He has written extensively in the fields of art and history and is best known for his ground-breaking BBC series *A History of Britain* (Roadshow 2000). This series was and is the bestselling series ever for the BBC and spawned a trilogy of tie-in books for the show, which continued the story up to the year 2000. It was also a major hit in the United States being brought to a large audience through the History Channel.

In 2008 Schama produced a more contemporary series on the history of the United States through the lens of specific issues. This series has just been released on DVD in Australia through Roadshow Entertainment.

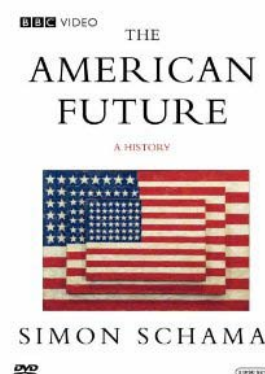
Schama's approach to history is well informed yet populist; he works to make the ins and outs of history approachable and communicates extra-ordinarily well. Ivory tower academics have complained to his "telescoping" approach to British history, yet with only fifteen one hour episodes there is only so much you can cover without the series being an academic treatise rather than a work of educational entertainment.

While Schama certainly isn't shy to express his political opinions, he was openly critical of George Bush and worked to support Obama, his documentaries are well balanced and try and examine various facets of any given event, period or theme.

Schama works to take an innovative approach to historical teaching so, for example, in his book *Dead Certainties* (1991) he took the death of two individuals General James Wolfe and that of George Parkman to speculate and explore life and death. This approach was continued in the final episode of the History of Britain where rather than taking a linear approach to the world wars, he compared the lives of Winston Churchill and George Orwell. In doing so he was able to offer a remarkable insight not only into each of these individuals but into the themes that



their lives and achievements embodied. In the case of Orwell these included workers' rights, the failure of the left, the danger of the right and the upcoming menace of new forms of authoritarianism.



The American Future: A History is a four part documentary series written and presented by Schama which aired on BBC Two in the UK during 2008 in the run up to the 2008 US presidential election. It was an unusual departure from the History of Britain in that it is thematically based and considers issues from the history of the United States and demonstrates how they continue to resonate in the present.

It has four episodes American Plenty, a look at the myth of the invincible America with special reference to the water crisis, issues regarding petroleum and land. American War examines the unique approach Americans seem to take to war and conflict from the earliest reaches of the civil war to the current conflict in Iraq. It also covers in some debate the nature of "hawks" vs. "doves" in American foreign policy.

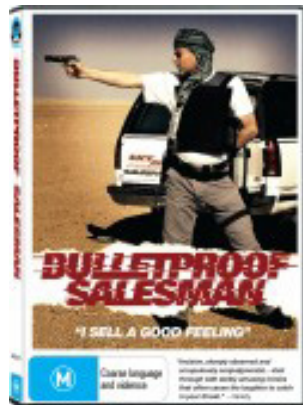
The controversial American Fervour examining that seemingly American intersection between religion and politics and What is an American ? covering race and immigration.

This has proved to be a very controversial series. While the British seem open to debate and consider their past many American's interpreted this series as some sort of personal assault on their nation's pride. Personal attacks abounded including ludicrous claims that this was "Marxist" propaganda and simply a puff piece to help Obama win the election. It is fair to say that the approach Schama takes in this series is very different from his earlier work, he has become somewhat more polemical with age and because he is exploring controversial themes expresses his own opinions clearly with, at times, an unequivocal eloquence. That is to not to say that this is a biased work, Schama has obviously researched the themes he covers well and presents various different views of the subject at hand. It is a challenging and stimulating series and certainly worth watching.

**Bulletproof
Salesman
Pepper and Bones
Films
Siren Visual
R4 DVD**

Fidelis Cloer is a German who sells armoured cars to wartorn countries, or to anyone who feels the need for a high level of personal protection. He also sells cars to dictators, civilian contractor firms, and police forces. This does not make him a war profiteer as such although he readily admits that wars are his best business opening for new business. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, for instance, led to sales of over 1000 vehicles following the collapse of that country's military and police forces.

He is open and honest about his work and his products. He points out that the old idea of "bulletproof cars" is no longer relevant. People do still take potshots at vehicles and will still hold up a "soft-skinned" vehicle if the opportunity presents itself, but his vehicles can stop anything up to an AK47 round (or, as we see in one of the demonstrations, quite a lot of them). With the increase in protective vehicle armour has come a change in the weapons used against them. Now his cars must be able to withstand blasts from Improvised Explosive Devices, the bane of the war in Afghanistan. These devices are using quite large amounts of explosives so the level of protection must be correspondingly high. We see one of his company's test vehicles being lifted off its wheels in one bomb test, but the interior of the vehicle was not compromised. More advanced vehicles also now offer the chance to use internal weapons firing through gun ports to fight back.

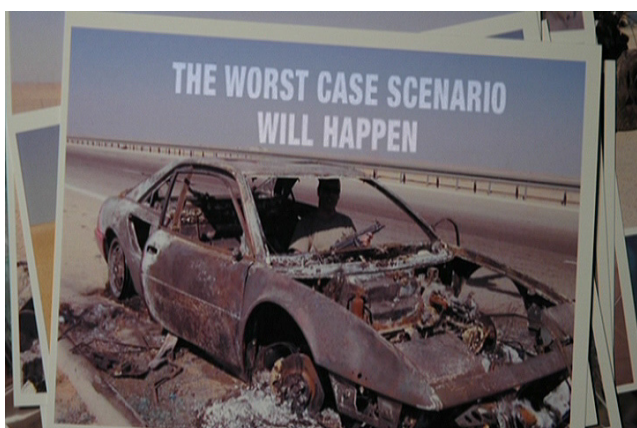


The documentary is quite gruesome. There are many movie clips of vehicles being blown up and of the sad aftermath of the explosions. Each of these is for Fidelis a learning experience – was the vehicle armoured? How big a bomb was used? Were the victims killed by the bomb itself or by debris flying around inside the car? He tries to learn as much as possible from each incident so he can improve his product. There are cheaper armoured vehicles out there but his intention is to make the best regardless of cost.

He also must convince likely targets of their vulnerability. American contractors Blackwater in Iraq sacked a manager who wanted to order armoured cars to protect the company's contractors and staff. Shortly after he was sacked a bomb blast killed a group of their contractors. At the time of making the documentary Blackwater was being sued by relatives for their lack of concern for their employees' safety.

The main part of the documentary deals with his travels and dealings in Iraq, followed by the developing situation in Afghanistan. The latest problem is suicide bombers who can get close to an armoured vehicle with quite large amounts of explosive. How can you guard against these? He has had to devise a series of security measures that reduce the risk of an attack in the first place. His vehicles do not look armoured, unlike some of the American ones, so they do not attract as much attention. Dress like the locals for the same reason. He avoids travelling near military convoys or other groups that may be targets. In the event of an attack the safest place to be is in the vehicle.

Such is the nature of war these days. Fidelis is not so much a war profiteer as a car salesman. His story is fascinating because it shows in compelling if gruesome detail one of the little byways of war and how some people must deal with it.



Crude
Radical Media
First Run Features
R1 DVD

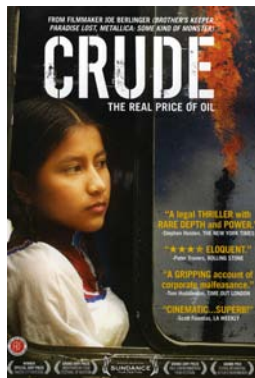
Mostly Spanish with English subtitles where needed

This 2009 documentary looks at the ongoing battle to obtain compensation to clean up a part of the Amazon basin contaminated by oil production. According to the local people they have suffered an alarming increase in disease, their streams and food have become contaminated and their culture is breaking down in the face of wholesale population shifts to get away from the poisons.

The trouble is the argument has been taken out of their hands and is now under the control of lawyers. The case has been dragging on for seventeen years (at the time of making the doco) and could drag on for another ten years. The documentary seems to be an attempt to raise public support for the local people, but I could not find it convincing. There are too many gaps in the information in the film.

To summarise, Texaco explored the Ecuador area of the Amazon basin twenty years ago. Oil was found in commercial quantities and exploitation commenced with government help. Since then Texaco has been bought out by Chevron and in turn the infrastructure has been transferred to the ownership of PetroEcuador, a local company which has a dreadful reputation for oil spills and pollution. This all confuses the picture, but some facts do appear to be accurate.

There is a oily-looking sludge beneath the soil in many areas. This may be leaching into the local streams, some of which do show a thin surface layer of petrochemical pollution. Whether this is

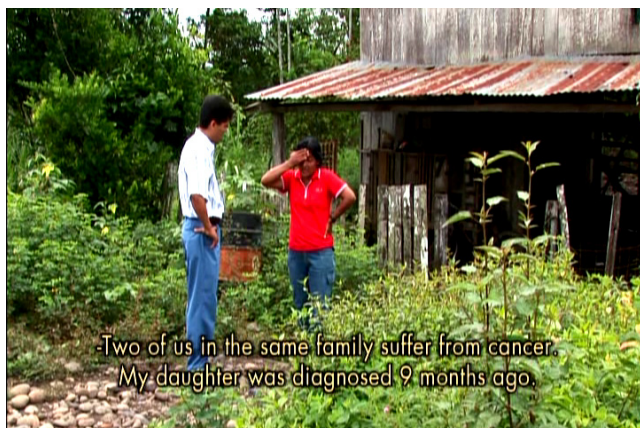


naturally occurring (crude oil coming to the surface in oil-bearing areas has been noted for thousands of years) or a result of poor remediation of past exploration is open to question. There are a number (up to a hundred) of dams where production sludge was dumped and has not been fully remediated. Some effort has been made to stop this sludge leaching into the environment.

The native people suffer skin diseases and cancers. Chevron maintains that the cancer rate is no higher than average. The natives maintain that Chevron is at fault. Chevron says they aren't. Unfortunately the facts of the case seem to be lost in the drive for media attention and the constant name-calling and bickering.

We are not told what the pollutants are despite





a number of analyses having been carried out. A Chevron test showed the water the natives drink and swim in has a very high count of faecal matter and a low level of petrochemicals so poor hygiene may be partly responsible.

With regard to the skin diseases, about forty years ago I lived in the Clarence River area of Australia. Fish in the area were dying in large numbers and the "fish scald" which has a strong similarity to the Indians' skin diseases was blamed on farmers and fertilisers. The cause turned out to be altogether different. Under the swamps of the area is a layer of "acid sulphate" soil built up from decaying organic matter over millions of years. In the airless environment at the bottom of a swamp they formed chemicals that were quite reactive. When the swamps were drained for agricultural land or otherwise dried out (and remember, the Amazon basin is really a huge swamp that is being increasingly developed) the sulphur compounds reacted with the air generating huge amounts of sulphuric acid that found its way into the river systems after every storm. The fish in the Clarence River were literally swimming in dilute sulphuric acid and developed skin diseases, then died in huge numbers.

Such possibilities do not seem to have been



considered in the documentary and I think this weakens it somewhat. That layer of sludge under the surface soil may need closer examination to see what it really is. We are not told its extent, either. Is it located in exploration areas only or is it right across the region? In other words has it been produced by drilling or other disturbance or is it a result of natural seepage or another cause?

PetroEcuador itself has a case to answer. They have inherited a worn out infrastructure, sure, but they do not appear to have the expertise to fix it. Both sides of the debate agree that many of the contaminated areas are in places where Texaco never explored, but where PetroEcuador did. PetroEcuador doesn't have much money. Chevron has. Is Chevron simply the most lucrative target? They think so. PetroEcuador is treated very lightly in the documentary.

Perhaps the most disturbing point is that the attempts to gather public support are using up large amounts of money. Even if a decision is reached in favour of the Indians, how much of the compensation will actually get past the lawyers? The longer Chevron delays the case with its own legal tactics the more it will cost the local people.

And in all this time what have the remaining local people done to improve their own health? Nothing. A charity arranged supply of plastic rainwater tanks so at least 4000 Indians can now get clean drinking water, but the streams are still the water supply for stock, the swimming hole for the kids, and the public sewer. Perhaps a good start would be to persuade the Indians not to crap in their drinking water?

Sorry, this documentary does not convince me. Rather than an attempt to raise public awareness it seems to be more an attempt to raise public sympathy (and, I assume, money).



Defamation
First Run Pictures
R1 DVD

Defamation is a fascinating and somewhat disturbing journey into the world of the politics of anti-Semitism. It is important to appreciate the significance of what this film achieves, it offers a balanced and insightful examination of how fear of prejudice can be used for political ends. The filmmaker is clear about the history and reality of anti-Semitism and its pernicious nature and discusses some frightening cases, such as the madman with a knife stabbing people in a Moscow Synagogue. At the same time he handles the difficult question of how the memories of the Holocaust and fear of anti-Semitism is used as a means to protect the political reputation of Israel.

The primary organization working against anti-Semitism in the U.S. is the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Defamation explores how this organization, while respected by many, is accused by others of being a P.R company for the Israeli government. A major theme in this film is whether it is correct to equate criticising Israel as a state and political system with anti-Semitism. While the ADL thinks that this equation is correct, it does seem to use the argument to stop any dissent against the activities of the state of Israel. It also seems to "inflate" reports of anti-Semitism with minor and fairly irrelevant incidents which could have as much to do with religion or personal clashes than race.

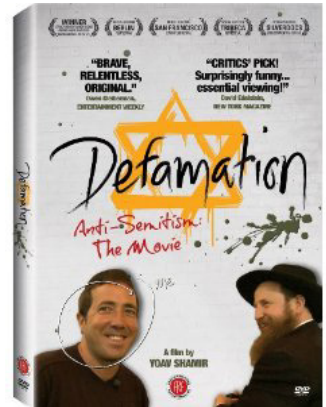
On the other side of the debate are various academics who not only think the ADL approach denigrates the reality of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism but is a tool for right wing Israeli politicians to avoid criticism of their hawkish policies. Explosive books have been written including *The Holocaust Industry* and *the Israel Lobby* and their authors are interviewed extensively throughout the film.

One of the more intriguing and disheartening aspects of the film is that tour offered to young Israeli's of the Nazi concentration camps. While certainly these tours are important, when you listen to what is being told to these young people, it

seems to be a deliberately orchestrated program of fear and manipulation. A scene which epitomizes this is when the girls speak to three old men; the men ask if they have come from Israel and laugh and say that it sounds like they are speaking Chinese and cannot understand them. The girls immediately claim the men called them bitches and made nasty faces at them, by mid-afternoon the tale has morphed into the men calling them donkeys and making threatening gestures. This constant indoctrination of a "victim" consciousness and a fear of the outside world is both tragic and rather disturbing. It may be of political value for Israel to have a population living with a heightened memory of the past but I am not sure of the psychological value.

The sections of the film which discuss the Palestinians are especially interesting, arguing that the Holocaust surely cannot be used to justify the suppression of another people that perhaps the oppressed have become the oppressor.

This is a highly intelligent documentary filled with thought provoking content and will stimulate debate for a long time to come. At the same time the filmmaker has a wry sense of humour and is more than willing to ask the hard questions.



Israeli schoolkids at Auschwitz

Earth (1930)
Mr Bongo Films
R2 DVD

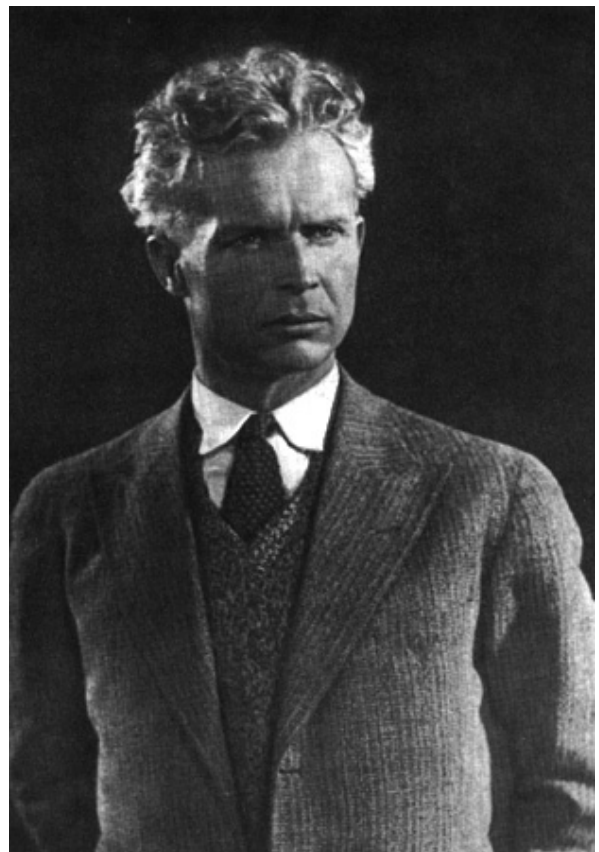
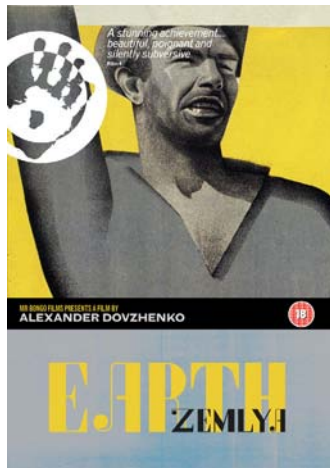
Although Alexander Dovzhenko's *Earth* (more correctly translated as "Soil") is regarded by many as in the same class as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, it is truly a bad film. It is dreadfully overacted, its themes are glaringly obvious as propaganda, and Dovzhenko lovingly dwelled on each major point enough to drive me to distraction.

Although silent films often tended to employ some overacting to emphasise a point, Dovzhenko used it so much that many of his characters became unsympathetic. Even the hero, Basil (Vasili), is so smug-looking that you would like to see his annoying toothy grin slip just once. The montages of the cycle of planting, growth and harvest are just as drawn-out and annoying.

The strength of the film lies in its value as a vehicle for the Communist party propaganda of the time. The small privately owned farms were being gathered into collectives, and some of the bigger landowners' estates were being treated the same – by force if necessary. The Party felt quite rightly that the inefficiencies of the small scale production system were holding back the development of Russia. The plains of the Ukraine could support many more Russians if they could be mechanised.



The Priest



Alexander Dovzhenko

To this end collective farms were supplied with tractors, the symbol of progress, which caused some friction with the older members of the community. Basil's village has just received its first tractor and the collective members celebrate. Even Basil's father, a doubter of the benefits, is convinced when he sees how much land the tractor can plough. We cut to an extended montage of ploughing, harvest, threshing the grain, and making the bread that will feed the developing country. Mechanisation is featured prominently. This was an important propaganda theme of the times.

The local kulak, the rich landlord farmer, is not impressed but cannot stand against the inevitable progress. There is however a lot of bad feeling between Basil and the kulak family especially when Basil uses the tractor to plough through the kulak's dividing fence and open up their fields to the collective. Their son is particularly bitter since it is his inheritance that is being taken from him. Then Basil collapses one night on the way home and is found dead the next morning. It could well have been a heart attack that took him, but Basil's father sees it as a murder.

Now we have another Marxist theme. His father



Filling the Radiator

denounces religion, saying there is no God and asking the village to give his son a funeral free of the trappings of church and priests. They must find a new way to bury their dead, and sing new songs for them. Some of the older villagers once again are doubtful about this change away from their long-held beliefs but the Party turns his funeral into a major propaganda piece. The kulak's son, mad with grief and over-acting, admits he killed Basil that night when he found him collapsed in the roadway.

The local priest is incensed, too. The scenes of him raging in front of the elaborate and rich altarpieces in his church are some of the most powerful in the film. He demands that God punish the village and all its people. This point is made a number of times in Dovzhenko's usual overstated manner, but it emphasises that religion is no friend of the people and will turn on them if slighted.

It seems he may get his asked-for revenge. In another drawn-out montage the crops are wiped out in a heavy storm. Basil's live-in girlfriend goes mad in an orgy of overacting. Finally, though, Basil's spirit and that of his girlfriend are reunited in a final triumphant scene ofwhat exactly? I really expected waving Russian flags behind them at this point.

Although the plot is simplistic we must remember that it was designed to carry the Party's message to the farmers in a way that the uneducated superstitious people could understand. There must have been a certain "WOW" factor when a travelling picture show came to a village and showed a film like this. The peasants would have been impressed with the new technology and this would make the message so much eas-



Living off the land

ier to put over. Rarely in the film are the farmers treated with any disrespect, except for a shot of one old farmer visiting the grave of his friend and waiting for him to speak from beyond the grave. Although the film shows the doubts that some peasants had about the new system, these doubters are also treated with respect and are, of course, eventually converted. Dovzhenko saved his hatred for the kulaks and the priests, the parasites of the heroic peasant class.

The film has been out of print for many years. This edition has been cleaned up and although there are some remaining artefacts they only enhance the film and show its age. Earth is an important memento of a turbulent time.

The End Of Poverty?
2010
Documentary
Cinema Libre 2010
R1 DVD

Director Phillippe Diaz uses a series of “talking head” interviews to discuss how the massive levels of poverty arose in the world today. Unfortunately this is one of the most boring possible formats he could have used, and much of the information given has been around for so long that the film falls rather flat. Its impact is reduced by the simple fact that we have heard most of this before. That said, though, there are some interesting points raised.

The various interviewees trace many of the problems back to the colonial days. One argument I haven't heard discussed before is that





Trying to deal with poverty and HIV/AIDS

before private ownership of land was introduced by the British in Africa, land was communally owned. Thus a villager always had access to land on which he could grow or graze something, either for his own subsistence or for trade for the goods he needed. The British system led to alienation of much of this land and it finished up in the hands of big landowners who could not farm it as intensively as the small villages could. Many of the villagers were dispossessed of their land and are the slum dwellers of today. Attempts to free up the big landholdings by people such as Robert Mugabe seem doomed to failure, as they merely perpetuate private ownership in African hands rather than go back to a communal system that evolved locally and worked. For me, this went a long way to explaining part of the African situation.

Private ownership of other communal assets like water, radio spectrum and transport also comes in for a serve. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund economic policies are rightly criticised here, as such privatisation is part of their policy for granting loans. The privatisation of these once publicly-owned assets has little if any advantage for the local people but serves to export profits back to the wealthy nations.

The point is well made that in the world today 20% of the population uses 80% of the resources and currently consumes 30% more than the planet can produce. That 20% is also responsible for 70% of global warming emissions. Although the runaway greed is highlighted, there are no suggestions as to how this can be halted. So far President Chavez of Venezuela seems to be the only one to try to restrict the flow of raw materials (in his case, oil) to the wasteful northern hemisphere countries. The economic system itself needs to be changed, but how? One speaker points out that all the economists and banks are geared to fit into the

existing system, so change from within seems unlikely.

The film summarises many of the relevant points about global poverty but does not offer solutions. After a while the reiteration of the problems simply becomes more background noise. There is also the concept that the Western world should be the one to do something about it. Little mention is made of efforts that could be made locally. One example that struck me early in the film is a huge slum on the outskirts of Nairobi. There is no sewage or drainage here, so human faeces are dumped in plastic bags on every fourth block. The disease risk is incredible. Surely it would be possible at minimal expense to the local government bodies to hire people to clear these disease traps and dig sewer trenches? It may not be perfect but it would have to be an improvement. Self-help IS an option, but is rarely mentioned in the film.

Similarly, the HIV / AIDS epidemic mentioned in the DVD can be treated by the people themselves. Leaving aside some of the more lunatic suggestions like abstinence, condoms are cheap and reasonably efficient and the local people could help themselves to reduce the size of their self-inflicted problem

There are some local people doing what they can to relieve the problems but funding is always a problem. So is the corruption that diverts so much of what aid money there is. This is a local political problem that can only be resolved by the people themselves..

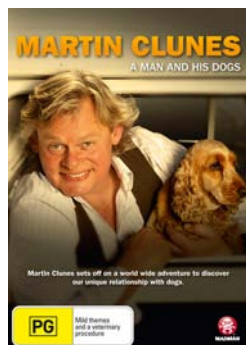
This is the film's weakness. It sticks to the old ideas and belabours them, but offers little that is innovative to solve the problems. Unfortunately this puts it across as just another self-indulgent guilt trip.



The dangers of overconsumption

Martin Clunes: A Man and His Dogs Madman R4 DVD

Martin Clunes is a well-known actor and television personality and has been involved in various documentaries. *A Man and His Dogs* is his most personal due to his enduring affection for his own dogs and his obvious enthusiasm for the canine species. Clunes literally oozes excitement as he makes more discoveries about the history of dogs or comes to experience new breeds first hand.



The journey Clunes makes is an impressive one. He opens the film by personally introducing us to his own dogs at his home Martin in Dorset, Tina and Arthur and then exploring the animal which shares 99.8 of its genetic material with the dog, the wolf. He first experiences them in the wild and then comes close-up to a wolf pack in a marvellous one-on-one encounter.

He then follows the evolutionary trek of the wolf to the pure bred Australian dingo which survives on Fraser Island and the mix breeds which live on the mainland. The mix breed dingoes come in all forms including one which likes to howl to the sound of the piano and others which form a unique relationship with the aboriginal people of the outback.

Clunes also explores the early origins of human-canine interaction with the working dog. These include Jack Russells who go ratting, sheep-dogs rounding up flocks in the Lake District and the police dogs that catch criminals. He also has the privilege of being dragged through sleet and snow by a team of overexcited huskies and dug out of the snow by a very impressive res-



cue dog who wants nothing more than a game of tug-a-war as thanks. At the same time Clunes is more than willing to handle more controversial aspects of dog breeding. He looks at our obsession with dogs which leads to such extremes as overpriced dog accessories and worse still, strict pedigree standards which leave dogs suffering with all manner of illnesses. Even showing us a surgical intervention to solve a health problem directly caused by pedigree breeding.

The pedigree dog issue has been much in the news of late in both the UK and Australia and Clunes makes it clear that the dog's wellbeing must come before any standard simply used for beauty and prestige. Dogs are not fashion objects but our friends and companions and must be respected and treated as such.

Clunes also visits Africa to see the only breed of dog which predates the wolf and which has never learnt to interact with humans. The wild dogs of Africa only accept an alpha from their own pack with the dead alpha being replaced with his son. Since there is no place for a human role within the pack, it has remained separate from man and hence is at great risk with a few surviving in the wild.

Clunes has an appealing manner, disarming us with his humour and charm and yet covering a lot of content in a short time. The documentary is well presented with flying visits to all sorts of locations and balances a celebration of dogs with a good overview of canine history, health issues and lots of other informative content.

Images © Buffalo Pictures

**The Mini
Documentary
Delta Music PLC
R2 DVD**

There is no doubt that the Mini was a car of its times. With the world coming out of World War II, petrol still rationed and in many countries weight tax penalties for bigger cars, the “family car” was simply out of reach for most families. Those cars that were available, particularly in Britain, were generally based on older unexciting prewar models. Imports were little better. A Renault Dauphine or a desperately underpowered Fiat were the alternatives. Alex Issigonis, a young engineer, had been working on a budget car for some years but the disorganised state of the British motor industry meant his project had been shelved.

When BMC was formed from the Morris and Austin companies the project was dusted off. The parameters were simple on the surface. The car had to be small and frugal. It had to be low cost. It had to carry four adults. It would use an engine from BMC's existing range. That Issigonis succeeded is a tribute to British engineering of the time. He took an existing A series Morris engine and put it on top of the transmission and drove the front wheels. Such an arrangement was not novel at the time but it moved all the transmission parts and the customary tailshaft out of the passenger compartment. That made room for the four adults – not a lot of room but enough. Construction was basic but strong, with exposed seams. Almost everything was an extra, like internal door handles. BMC substituted a smaller engine, feeling that the one Issigonis had selected might make the car too fast.

The car took a few years to really start selling, mostly due to its being so unexciting. It needed something to make it more interesting. That “something” was John Cooper. A racing driver and engineer, he put the bigger engine back and proceeded to win race after race. The image of the little flying Mini Cooper was just what



the car needed to attract attention and sales started to increase. Suddenly it all came together. The tiny wheels and comparatively wide wheelbase gave the little car tremendous stability for racing. The minimalist approach to internal fittings meant owners could customise their car. At a selling price of under five hundred pounds it was within everyone's reach. Suddenly the Mini was an exciting car and the rest of the world thought so too.

We follow the series of ensuing models and upgrades, and then the gradual slide into the accountant-driven British Leyland. Lord Stokes simply did not realise what an asset the Mini had become. Finally the Mini name fell into Rover's domain, but the car ceased production. Its quality had been tarnished by increasingly shoddy workmanship and a failure to keep it up to date. It deserved a better fate.

Rover was bought by BMW, a company not known for making such small cars. BMW decided to revive the car and keep as much of the original design philosophy as possible. In today's congested cities and with increasing oil prices there could still be a place for the Mini. Their new Mini showed what the older car could have become, but it was now fighting for sales against Asian imports. That and the much higher price tag means that the Mini has now lost its momentum in sales.

The DVD has many good shots of beautifully restored Minis covering the entire range. Unfortunately most of the footage seems to have been taken at a single Mini owners meeting and the footage becomes a little repetitious. It would have been nice to see a few more shots of racing Minis, for instance, instead of the same cars driving slowly along the same highway. Still, with the excellent coverage of the Mini's history and the restored cars I think this DVD will rekindle the Mini spirit in the minds of many former owners.



**Paul McCartney Really Is Dead
The Last Testament
of George Harrison
Highway 61
Entertainment
MVD Visual
R1 DVD**

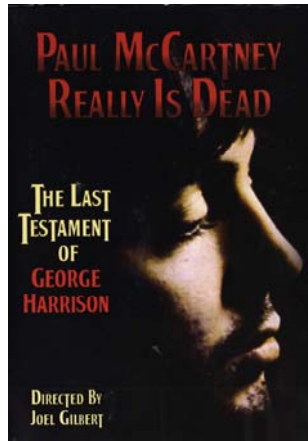
The Last Testament is directed by Joel Gilbert and not affiliated with estate of George Harrison, Paul McCartney, William Campbell, Apple Corp or The Beatles.

At first I thought this DVD was a spoof, but the further it goes the more obvious that it is meant to be taken seriously.

Unfortunately it has so many holes that I can't do that and spent a lot of my time laughing at it instead.

Let's start with the basic conspiracy. In 1966 Paul McCartney took off from Abbey Road Studios in his car following an argument. He crashed the car and was decapitated. MI5 (What would they have to do with it? Their job is protecting Britain's national security – counterespionage and so on) instigated a coverup and substituted a false Paul. They were concerned that if the news got out there would be mass suicides of silly hysterical little girls around the world. (Really? It would only increase the world's average IQ).

The "conspiracy" was revealed by a U.S. radio announcer who said he pieced together clues in the Beatles' records and cover art to for his conclusion. The theory was a nine-day wonder, then fizzled out.



This DVD now rehashes the theory. According to the PR material and the cover slick...

"In the summer of 2005 a package arrived at the Hollywood offices of Highway 61 Entertainment from London (cue picture of tatty looking envelope with lots of British stamps on it) with no return address. Inside were two minicassette audio tapes dated December 30, 999 and labelled The Last Testament of George Harrison. A voice identical to Harrison (no, it's not) tells a shocking story" and so on.

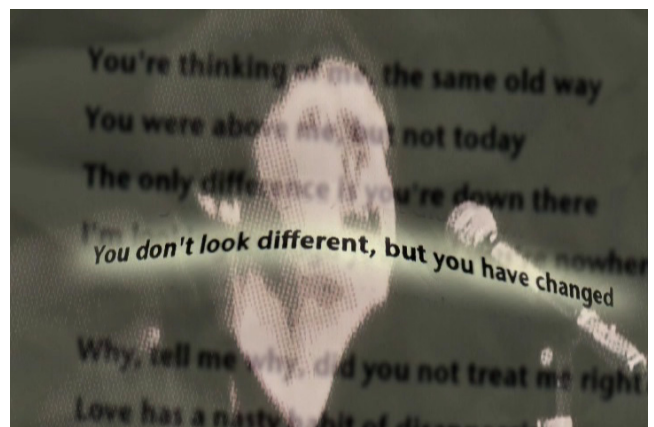
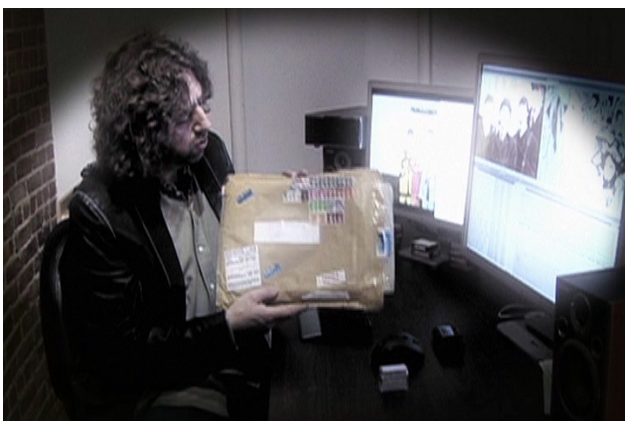
Now we switch to conspiracy theory mode. The tapes were allegedly subjected to three separate forensic analyses to see if the voice really was George's. The results were inconclusive according to the documentary, but nevertheless from here on it is treated as if genuine.

This is a typical conspiracy theory trick - make some wild assertion, hedge it with a few ifs and buts, then carry on as if it's true. It is now up to the viewer to prove it wrong. This is lost, however, in the amount of early Beatles history padding out the doco.

Now we go for the completely unsupported Big Lie. After rambling on about the early history of the Beatles "George" tells us of an MI5 operative called Maxwell who threatened the surviving Beatles with death if they didn't go along with the story.

A substitute "false Paul", whom "George" comes to call "Faul", was picked, trained and given plastic surgery. He was then carefully inserted into the group who had to carry on as normal.

Conspiracy theorists love to blame organizations like the big corporations, government security bodies and especially the CIA. Nothing they say can be officially denied (well, they





WOULD deny that, wouldn't they?) or even ignored (The CIA remains silent on the issue). They are damned either way.

One of the silliest parts of the DVD is the Beatles visit to India. There they hoped that the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi would open up Paul's inner consciousness so he could receive the spirit of Paul, lose his false identity and become truly the Paul they all knew and loved. This, not surprisingly, didn't seem to work.

John Lennon was, according to the story, still upset at Paul's death and decided to include clues in their future records so fans would realise Paul was really dead. Now we go into a long series of "clues" in record cover photos, sleeve pics and song titles. All these "prove" the conspiracy theory. In Sgt Pepper's, for instance, much is made of the "fact" that the photos in the collage are all of people who are dead, or who experienced a near-death phenomenon, or sang about death (or in fact were still alive?). Sometimes they went too close to revealing the truth and got a visit and a hiding from the dreaded Maxwell and his men.

John then turned to "reverse masking", embedding words in the songs that could only be heard if the record was played backwards. Some clue. We hear examples on the DVD and if they weren't subtitled with the words that are supposedly there I would regard them as gibberish. Most words start with an "attack" – a sudden quick rise in the sound – then fades out ("Decays"). Say "bang" and you will see what I mean. If these words are played backwards the decay will be at the start of the word, which will seem to fade in quickly then finish sharply.

The "speech" on the records when played backwards does not show this – in fact it shows the decay first leading up to the attack – just as it should if it was played backwards. Any similarity



to words is wishful thinking rather than fact. Incidentally, I am a Beatles fan, I tried this when the rumours were first published, and I heard nothing in reverse. I think the examples on the DVD may have been enhanced a little.

Lennon went to the U.S. following the group's breakup and according to the doco feigned increasing madness to try to convince MI5 that he was harmless. Or perhaps it was just his regular use of recreational pharmaceuticals? Either way when he was shot by a crazed gunman the doco blames it on MI5, rather than just the ultimate criticism of Lennon's music. It also suggests that Paul knew something about it since he wasn't surprised.

"George Harrison" according to the tapes was now in fear of his life and when he was attacked by a knife-wielding intruder in his home in Britain, he was convinced that MI5 was behind it. He recorded the tapes so the truth could come out if he died. Then they were sent to some obscure little movie company in the U.S. instead of to a major overseas newspaper or someone who could publish them with impunity. Joel Gilbert and his company Highway 61 Entertainment are producers of, shall we say, "controversial" documentaries.

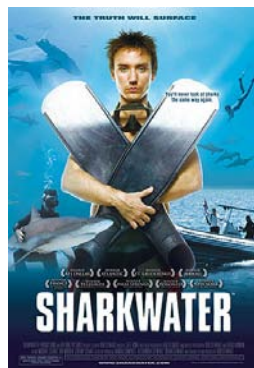
The doco is the classic conspiracy theory of half-baked facts, irrelevant connections, wishful thinking and unsupported assertions. I had a good laugh at it until I realised that there are people out there who will believe this. Then I had another good laugh at them as well.

Bonus features on the DVD include Bob Dylan Meets The Beatles, the film soundtrack and MP3s for IPOD.

Web: <http://paulreallyisdead.com>

Sharkwater
Alliance Films
Horizon Motion
Pictures

Rob Stewart is a man with a mission. He wants us to accept that sharks are not the savage predators painted by films like *Jaws*, but instead are a vital part of the ocean ecosystem.



As the top predator in the ocean food pyramid they have held their position for millions of years, a testament to their efficiency. Now they must contend with a new predator – man.

Stewart believes that sharks have had a bad press mostly because of their curiosity. He is a skilled underwater photographer and some footage in this documentary shows just how much a swimmer looks like an injured seal, a favourite shark food. If a shark is not sure you are edible, Stewart says, it will try a test bite first. That's why so many shark "attacks" are really only bites, not a full flesh-tearing wound. He points out that there are only five fatal shark attacks each year compared with twenty people killed by drink machines. Here is the first point that concerns me about the documentary. Where do these figures come from?

A man with no qualms whatever about promoting the dangers of sharks is William Goh, president of Rabbit Brand Shark Fins in Taiwan. He enthusiastically supports the idea of sharks as master predators and you get the idea that we should be thanking him for turning these evil beasts into useful food. He also supports the idea that shark fin contains some sort of magical property that can prevent cancer, since no one has ever seen a shark die of cancer.

By eating shark fin a person can prevent cancer



in themselves by some sort of transference of the shark's magic properties. Of course, it's a bit rough on the rest of the shark which then dies because it can't swim.

Food? A shark fin is mostly gelatinous cartilage, quite tasteless. It is mixed into pork or chicken stock to give it "texture". Frankly it looks disgusting but in Asia it is regarded as a prestige dish. The fins therefore command high prices - a pound of fin is worth around \$200.

"There is so much money in fins that only traffic in drugs rivals the profits."

Shark "finning" is becoming a major problem wherever there are large numbers of sharks still to be found, such as in Australia's Gulf of Carpentaria. As other areas are fished out the finners move into other countries' waters, or even marine reserves, ruthlessly stripping the shark population until many species are now endangered.

Stewart joined Paul Watson and the Sea Shepherd organization to examine and film finning in the Galapagos and Cocos in Costa Rica. Both areas are marine reserves but there is no legislation to protect them and no government support for such protection. What they found was a marine disaster. Cocos Island was a free go for the long line finners. Lines with up to sixty miles of baited hooks are run out. Any sharks caught

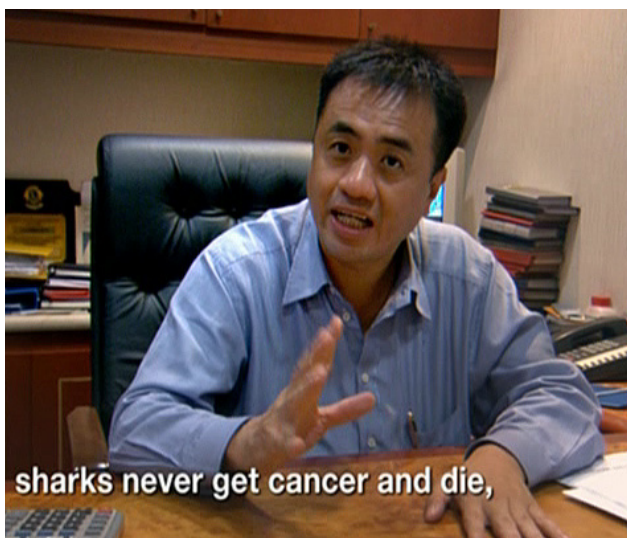




are usually drowned. Their fins are hacked off and the carcass thrown overboard. When the Sea Shepherd was asked to intercept one finner ship by the President they had to ram it to stop it. They then towed it to port where they were arrested for attempted murder of the finners because they had rammed the finner ship. The finners themselves were not charged with anything. The amounts of money involved in finning are so great that buying political influence in such a country is cheap.

Investigating further they found an entire inlet of the port lined with private docks and warehouses serving the finning industry. Thousands of dollars' worth of fins were drying in the sun on concealed spots on the roofs. They were destined for places like Taiwan. Realising they would never see justice in a country controlled so thoroughly by the Taiwanese "mafia", the Sea Shepherd put to sea breaking its arrest. On a later clandestine visit to the country Stewart was gratified to see public demonstrations against finning and the corruption in the government. Perhaps there is some hope after all.

In the Galapagos the situation was little differ-



Sharks kill 5 people each year.

elephants and tigers: 100
execution: 2,400
illegal drugs: 22,000
road accidents: 1,200,000
starvation: 8,000,000

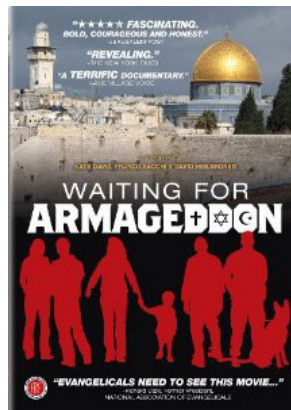
ent. Local fishermen had fished out their waters and now wanted to turn to finning as a source of income. When the government refused the fishermen rioted, taking National Parks workers prisoner and burning their offices. The fishermen threatened to kill the last Galapagos tortoises if they did not get their way. The Government caved in for a time and the finning industry took over until the Government reinforced the National Parks people with navy ships and closed it down.

As mentioned, the finners have now moved into other areas lured by the huge amounts of money to be made. Australia's north is now at risk and the Australian Navy is regularly intercepting finner ships from Indonesia, Taiwan and East Timor. The documentary does not offer any suggestions on how to stop the problem at its source by educating people that shark fin is not magic nor even tasty. While ever superstition like this is promoted by people like William Goh the problem will remain and more species will vanish.



Waiting for Armageddon First Run Features R1 DVD

Waiting for Armageddon is an eye opening exploration of the world of Christian Zionism. Rather than offering a polemic or commentary, the film is largely composed of Christian Zionists speaking for themselves.



A wide variety of fundamentalists and evangelical Christians are interviewed as well as various Jewish authorities and a number of experts including Mel White of Soulforce and a representative from the Southern Poverty Center. Allowing the fundamentalists to speak for themselves is perhaps even more frightening than films such as *Religulous* by Bill Maher that ridicule them. It is astounding to hear what they have to say and the convoluted logic they use to back up their position. The sheer arrogance they express their opinions with is both breathtaking and disconcerting.

So what is Christian Zionism? Christian Zionism is a pro-Israel religious position held by a large segment of the Evangelical and fundamentalist Christian. It is based on an end-of-the-world theology known as "pre-tribulationism" which states that after certain conditions are met Jesus will return, carry away the saved to the skies (the rapture) and plunge the world into seven years of cleansing and violence. Included within this quirky theology is the belief that since the Jews rejected Jesus they play a special role in this divine melodrama. Before Jesus can re-

turn the Dome of the Rock must be demolished one way or another and the original Jewish temple rebuilt. This will herald the return of Jesus who will come riding a white horse (and brandishing a burning sword) into Jerusalem. 144,000 Jews will convert and the rest will be slaughtered for their insolence in refusing his offer of salvation and the tribulation will begin where mankind will be given over to daily torture and disaster for thinking for themselves.

It is important to consider just how utilitarian the Christian Zionists support for Israel really is. Israel only matters because it will be the trigger for Armageddon and Jesus' return. As part of this rather disturbing equation Jews must either give up being Jewish and convert to Christianity or Jesus will slaughter them. It is a startling piece of theological twaddle which is both worrying and disturbing. It is decidedly intolerant and anti-Semitic and yet at the same time underlies so much of U.S and Israeli relations.

Since so many Americans are evangelicals, including many in positions of power (Ronald Reagan and George Bush are prime examples) that even foreign policy is conditioned by this belief. In addition Israel must play along with the game since a vast amount of funds are donated each year by Christian-Israel lobbies and organizations and this is not even considering the vast Christian tourist industry.

The DVD follows the various stages of the supposed end of the world drama from the Rapture through the Tribulation to the Millennium with frightening and revealing interviews. It is really quite terrifying when one considers that 50 million Americans believe the world is ending soon and live their lives accordingly. I especially felt for the young people interviewed who live in fear believing that they would not get a chance to get a job, graduate or develop a relationship since Jesus was returning soon. In my books this is psychological child abuse on a vast scale, stealing the innocence of teens and not allowing them to enjoy their lives due to the belief in an antiquated but dangerous fantasy.

This is a sobering and fascinating documentary. Too often we look upon evangelical Christianity as just a matter of private belief but when it begins to effect government policy and the lives of a whole generation of children we need to put it in the same category as Islamic terrorism and the Taliban; they are the same breed, just expressing their hatred in more refined language.



Baptism in the Jordan River - Evangelical style

Wunder De Schopfung
1925, released on DVD
1992
Film & Kunst GMBH
for
Filmmuseum Munich
All Regions

German with title cards
and English language
overdub



This early film by Hanns Walter Kornblum is possibly the earliest attempt to popularise science by using filmmakers' techniques to explain it to the masses. It was a brave attempt at a time when few schools (the likely biggest market) had any film projection equipment and the big cinemas had not considered documentaries as a serious prospect. Kornblum had experience in making commercials and advertising films so was probably better suited for this work than producers of conventional dramas. He understood the process of model making and graphics to demonstrate a point.

Although it was a documentary the film was dressed up with a certain amount of science fiction such as spaceship shots to give it more appeal. As the Nazi organization moved more into filmmaking, it caused problems for Kornblum. Major Ernst Krieger, head of the Culture Department, appeared not to know what a planet was, but he had definite ideas on what the film should contain.... "we have to get a couple of naked girls in here".

This film was intended to be part of a longer series explaining science to the German people. As well as the main film on Astronomy, "Our Heavenly Bodies", the DVD also includes a short film on Albert Einstein. Kornblum actually tries to explain the Theory of Relativity with some quite good examples. This was just before Einstein was denounced as a Jew and his



works were banned in Germany.

Our Heavenly Bodies is a comprehensive examination of the solar system, planet by planet, and I was amazed at just how much of the science is the same as today. The early scientists were surprisingly well informed and it makes you wonder what astronomers have been doing for the past 85 years. There is a really good history of the development of astronomy from the beginning of the church-supported Earth-centric concept, through the astronomers who fought for and introduced the Sun-centric design that we accept today. Many of these astronomers published their ideas at some risk to their own life – if it was against the accepted church doctrine they could be burned as heretics no matter how good their evidence or observations were.

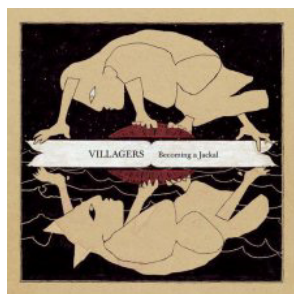
The film is a fascinating look at "antique science", which turns out to have been surprisingly accurate. Kornblum intended that the film should be shown as an illustrated lecture and the modern voiceover handles this very well. Perhaps the only negative is the dreadful whining violin and tuneless piano backing music.

This film deserves its place in the history of science and the history of film.



Becoming a Jackal
Villagers
Domino
EMI (Australia)

Villagers is actually Irish singer-songwriter Conor O'Brien. While there are a large number of singer-songwriters on the market, O'Brien takes a darker and more reflective turn and the songs linger in your memory far beyond their first unveiling.



It is an impressive debut album with strange and wonderful lyrics, a lush atmospheric sound and a sweet voice which sounds a bit like the early Peter Gabriel from Genesis.

At the same time the lyrics are not superficial and offer interesting food for thought including the opening *I Saw the Dead* to the final track which reflects on a Pope who is in spiritual crisis !

It covers the gambit of territory from the lush to the gothic, to the edgy to the uplifting; clocking in at about three quarters of an hour, it is a fascinating journey into the complex dreams and visions of a young man who has a maturity, both musically and personally, way beyond his age.



Cinema
The Cat Empire
EMI

The Cat Empire are one of Australia's best bands, with a sound that is very original.



They create an eclectic audio experience which knocks your socks

off bringing together jazz, funky, soul, Latin and of course, rock.

They have very devoted fans and each album brings massive anticipation. They are just as successful in the studio as live and having tested a few of their new tracks on JJJ radio, *Cinema* finally hit the streets.

The general consensus about *Cinema* and I would concur is that while it has the same unique Cat Empire sound it has moved-on into a more sophisticated sound. It is not as funky as their earlier albums nor shows as many Latin influences.

However once you listen to it a few times it becomes more and more infectious and I have come to like just as much if not a little more than their last two albums. Many fans have been disappointed and argue it this album has lost the unique funk edge, but I think that it has a more developed even textured sound which will satisfy if given a chance.

The album opens with *Waiting* which is short, sweet and a very typical Cat Empire Sound followed by *Falling* which is a bit more poppy.

Feelings Gone is an impressive lyrical work following by only light.

All Hell and Shoulders certainly offers some amazing instrumentals and are textured and impressive songs.

While the songs continue being impressive, the final track *Beyond All* is a stand out. It closes the album with a powerful track which is fast, jazzy and well, amazing.



VAMPLETS



Vampires are hot at the moment, from TV series to *Twilight*, cult films to graphic novels. While accessorizing the vampire lifestyle has always been an option with goth clothes and dark gear, the newest items on the block are a series of plush toys known as Vamplets.

Vamplets are very cute but creepy baby plush vampires which measure between nine and ten inches in height. They combine the cuddly qualities of a baby with a nappy and accoutrements with the goth look of a vampire. Artist G-Ra was inspired by the works of Edward Gorey and it certainly shows. Dark, sweet and slightly kooky. There are six in all, each with their own shadowy persona.

Lily Rose Shadowlyn has red blood shot eyes, two black bat bows on her head and a pretty pink striped nappy.

Black tiny roses and bats with pink noses. Sweet as a thorn the day she was “unborn.” The most normal of the Vamplets, she is pleasingly well-behaved, shares and plays nicely with others!

But being a vampyre, Lily has a dark side—a fierce temper that flares when she’s pushed too far.



Burton Creepson Jnr has a single bat bow, dark bloodshot eyes and a pretty purple nappy with a skull on it. Shucks, he’s a beauty!



Painting with blood, his fingers so red. He entertains all of the other Un-dead! This little artist loves to finger-paint with blood. He can be moody and dark and tormented, so he hangs out with bats in dark places. His favourite hobby is to fashion “screamcatchers” out of spider webs.



Midnight Mori has a pretty pink bow with a skull, green bloodshot eyes and cute little black skull and cross bones nappy tied with a pink bow!



A demon in diapers, bossy and restless. A fanatical leader you don’t want to mess with! Don’t let the sweet hair bow fool you—she can be bossy and she always wants her way, so don’t ever tell her no. Mori is a leader of the Vamplets and she’s restless, aggressive and annoyed, since she doesn’t like to sleep.

Count Vlad von Gloom has two bat bows, green bloodshot eyes and a black skull nappy tied with a white bow. His mouth looks down in gloom!

So cute but so cruel, descended from Drac.



Blood is always his favourite snack! Known as arrogant (he's royalty, after all), this baby vampyre enjoys his bed-of-nails playpen and his bottle, which is filled with blood, his favourite drink.

Cadaverson

Nightshade has a lovely spider on her head, grey bloodshot eyes, a sneaky smile and a grey nappy with a purple skull tied with a black bow.



Inventor, dreamer, dark tiny schemer. Building all night to create a big fright! This little guy never utters a sound because he's so busy inventing and thinking. He builds creepy creations by taking things apart. He has even trained his pet spider to weave fantastical web structures.

Evilyn Nocturna

has two black bows with pink and white skulls attached, she has the look of a scared cat with eyes raised and bloodshot. She wears a cute black poke a dot nappy with a pick bow.



Slightly strange and totally bad. You don't need a hunch...she'd prefer you for lunch! This tiny sorceress is slightly mad. She'd rather bite you than drink from her bottle of blood. She's psychic with lots of visions and precognitive dreams. Plus she sleepwalks, so keep her locked in her coffin during daylight hours.

Each comes with a tag shaped like a bottle of blood that includes the charac-



ter's name, an "Official Certificate of Possession of a Baby Vampyre" and instructions on how to get more items for your Vamplet.

You can also purchase a bottle of Vamplets Disappearing "Bottle of Blood" - these vampires need to be fed. Just turn the bottle upside down and the blood seems to instantly disappear.

With our delivery came a certificate of Condolences signed by Beth DeSangus, explaining the dangers of letting the Vamplets into our home and how to care for them. Awesome !

There is also an interactive website with a store which sells six plus Vampire babies. The interactive world is loads of fun. There is a Town Hall where you can register your Vamplet and download a certificate. A Hall of Horror with loads of lots of background on the Vamplets including individual portraits, characteristics and warnings about their idiosyncrasies. A funeral parlour where you can create your Vamplet's tombstone and coffin and a cute animated nursery. There is also a blog and forum.

Vamplets are cute, dark, funny, horrid and terrible. They are packed with character, beautifully made and a must have dark pleasure.

Web: <http://www.vamplets.com>



CAMILLA d'ERRICO



Camilla d'Errico is a product of her split heritage, Italian and Canadian rolled into one: Italian feistiness, Canadian politeness, and an early addiction to Saturday morning cartoons, comics and manga. Growing up she was more often doodling sexy damsels and dragons on her textbooks than reading them.

In 1998 when Camilla first attended her first San Diego Comic Con she realised that a 9-5 day job would kill her and this was what she wanted to do. Thanks to her relentless energy, dedication, and just enough sleep deprivation, she has followed her dream of working creatively for a living.

Camilla's unique style continues to be in demand and her client list includes Dark Horse Comics, Image Comics, Random House, Tokyopop, Hasbro, Disney, Sanrio, Neil Gaiman and she also works with video game and movie companies on character development. Her own characters and properties, *Tanpopo* and *Helmetgirls*, are loved by fans and followers and now inspire Cosplay costumes. She has successfully merchandised and licensed her beautiful artwork across a variety of categories: clothing, stationery and gift, accessories, art prints, etc. and continues to expand her licensing program.

Her emotive and eloquent paintings have propelled her to the top of the ranks of the New Contemporary art movement, and she is represented by Opera Gallery of New York.

Camilla can't live without Holbein's "DUO" water-soluble oils, green tea lattes, Hello Kitty merchandise, and her daily fix of manga and anime.

"Its about expressing what they feel and feeling what they express"

Kuro Poodle is The Devil's Dog. Kuro literally means black and do not let his cuteness fool you. After all, he is The Devil in disguise ! Straight out of *Tanpopo*, Camilla's comic series, Kuro is a superb plush.

15cm in height with a strange and enigmatic white face. He is both adorable and quirky. His production run is limited to 1500 pieces.



Out of the pages of *Tanpopo* Volume 2, *Poodle Kuro* makes a shocking transformation into *Specter* - as he shoots the specter bark and kills the albatross! Beautifully made in white with a black face and a startling white mouth, *Specter* is a stunning plush.



This variant follows the original, 15cm *Kuro Poodle* black plush. Limited to only 1500 pieces.

If you would like to carry *Kuro* and *Specter* with you everyday then why not get the keyrings ?

These are nicely made PVC keyrings 2 inch x 1.25 inch with an attached key-chain.



Camilla's plush and keyrings are based on characters in her *Tanpopo* series. There have been two comics so far and they are visually powerful, emotionally engaging and beautifully drawn.

Tanpopo Volume #1 has been reprinted and is now in an extended version with additional pages and a new ending that continues and gives life to a new series of books.



Tanpopo could be seen as an adaptation of traditional Manga, it includes poetry, thought bubbles and varying formats of text. It is innovative and very engaging.

Edge and emotion bring to life the story of a young girl who makes a pact with a devil. She is released from the machine that has been her only existence for the hope of finding happiness.

It is forty pages in length and in full color it measures 6.5 x 9.75 inches.



The saga of Tanpopo continues ... Samuel Taylor Coleridge's, Rime of the Ancient Mariner, along with some of Coleridge's short poems, are the inspiration for Volume Two.

Lessons of life and emotion are not for the faint of heart, as Tanpopo will learn. Kuro shoots off Specter Bark, and strikes down the albatross. His transformation takes a life and delivers a message. Will Tanpopo understand?

The book contains 52 full colour pages of beautiful illustrations and moving words that follow the expanded Tanpopo Volume 1.

Once again Camilla offers us a highly stylized work of Manga, beautifully drawn and filled with thought provoking content. Both of these comics are superbly published and create an intriguing and wonderful world worth exploring.



Camilla is a very productive artist and her site is filled with all sorts of goodies. There is *The Birds and the Bees* postcard series which includes twelve rather naughty images from her 2007 show. These are sexy and very nice. She also produces Gelaskins, handbags, posters and prints.

Her latest release is truly outstanding. This giant version of Kuro is a limited edition of 100 pieces only so you better get in quick. Rub his belly for good luck, hug him 'till you're sore.

Buddha Kuro is your giant "little" devil, Forever.

Buddha Kuro stands a full 2 feet (60 inches) tall! He is about 1 foot wide and nearly a foot deep. Yes, he's huge. And he's awesome.



Web: <http://www.camilladerrico.com/>

Splurrt



Joe Merrill graduated from Columbus College of Art & Design (in Columbus Ohio) with a BFA in 2006. My major was in Advertising and Graphic design. He knew nothing about sculpture or toy making and had only sculpted once in his life, outside of playing with Fimo and silly putty as a kid.

After he graduated Joe got a job at an ad agency in Columbus. There was a small toy store in the city, Anime Palace, and Joe started buying blind box toys to decorate his office. He wasn't a serious collector and wouldn't really get into collecting toys until he moved to New York City.

Joe moved to NYC about a year after graduating from college. He got more and more into toys because there were lots of stores around like Toy Tokyo, Giant Robot, and Kid Robot, and he could see the vinyls in person. One day Joe was researching Pushead toys online and discovered the Cocobat Joe and Cocoboy vs. Skullbonz set. They got him really interested in Henshin and Walder toys, and lead him to discovering the Secret Base cyborg suits. Once he discovered Secret Base, he also discovered Mad Toyz, Skull Toys, TWIM, Tokyo Guns, BxH, Cure and Blobpus and many others.

All the neo-kaiju stuff blew Joe's mind. It's hard to verbalize why. It was very mysterious, maybe it was the language barrier, or maybe it was due to what seemed like a lack of story, or creator input. To Joe the toys relied 100% on their aesthetics.

There was no cartoon or comic exploring or defining the character; you didn't have previously developed restriction on the character. Your response to the toy is based only on the feelings the design stirs up. Perhaps it's because you have so much freedom to respond to the toy, that there's a very creative response.

It seems this is why so many collectors turn to

customizing, creating fan art, photographing their toys, or even creating their own toys - like Joe does.

Joe's love of Henshin Cyborg and all of the arm weapons and attachments lead to developing the idea for *The Executioner*. Joe was inspired to sculpt and make him, even though he hadn't sculpted in seven years. It was just a personal challenge, like he had to make him to prove that he was able to do so.

Joe read some tutorials, bought some sculpey and tools and started work. Joe and his girlfriend thought about the brand name for a long time, wanting something quite unique. One night during brainstorming and watching Futurama - it was an episode about Slurm soda, Joe heard Slurm, and liked the direction. Soon after, Splurrt was born.

Joe liked the word and envisioned



The Executioner cutting off a head and the blood spray making the noise *splurrt*. It was nonsensical, gross, slimy, bloody, and fun.

Joe worked on *The Executioner* for almost a year having no idea what he was doing, yet he was determined to finish it and make it to the best of his abilities. He sculpted every piece at least three times. He snapped the leg off a few times and snapped him at the waist a few other times. It was slow going. And once the figure was finally done, he wouldn't even end up getting produced for a year.

After *The Executioner* was finished. Joe made *The Slug*. With *The Slug* Joe just wanted to sculpt dripping slime. It was one of his favorite textures at the time and just seemed like a lot of fun to do. Plus, after *The Executioner* Joe wanted to produce a simpler figure. He contacted Monstre Hero about casting the *Slug* in resin, since they were producing the highest quality resin figures. They were into it, an unholy alliance was born, and it became the first Splurrt resin figure.

Joe followed *Slug* up with the *Bad Trip*, his first mini figure. He had been thinking about doing a mushroom figure for a while, working on preliminary sketches. Joe was looking for a way to make the toy different enough from existing mushroom toys and eventually came up with the idea of a removable cap that revealed a monster underneath.

While working with Monstre Hero on the *Slug* and *Bad Trip*, Joe stated talking to them about making *The Executioner* as a ball jointed resin figure. Joe loved the idea in theory, but didn't really understand how difficult an undertaking it would be. It takes \$30 U.S. in resin just to make one cast. He's a big boy. People say, *"I wish he was a vinyl, I don't collect resin, but I'd buy a*



vinyl." But as Joe says *"Looking back at the labor, and the cost of the molds, and the resin, and the work required to clean the resin casts, sometimes think cost wise - I almost could have made him in vinyl. But I think as a ball-jointed resin figure, he's so unique, he has a presence in a collection. He's not just another vinyl. So I'm glad I went with resin"*.

So while Monstre Hero was working on "resinating" *The Executioner*, Joe needed something new to work on and started *The Keeper*. Joe was watching cartoons one day, and saw one of those classic robed ghouls and thought, *"That needs to be a toy."* The sculpt went quickly and smoothly; he was very pleased to see how his abilities as a sculptor were coming along. Certainly the feedback he got on the figure, was validation. People were telling him that it was on the same level as Secret Base. That's a brand that Joe idolizes, so hearing things like that, it seemed like people were starting to appreciate his work and see it on level beyond "home made" resin.

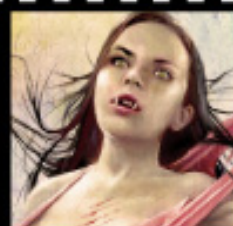
After the *ghoul*, Joe made a new head for the Executioner body. It's a deformed burnt mess hidden by a hockey mask, I've dubbed it the *"Axe Murderer"* it compliments the body and axe arm really nicely and it is surprising how both heads create two completely different characters. Joe has always kind of sympathized with *The Executioner*, seeing him as a poor beast born in a situation beyond his control; trying to survive with the only tool he has. Where the *Axe Murderer* is more the typical "slasher" monster; a machine that kills for pleasure.

You can visit <http://www.Splurrt.com> to keep up with the latest headlines.

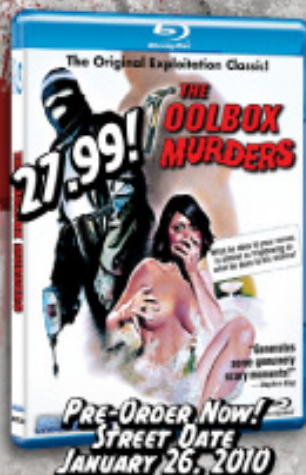


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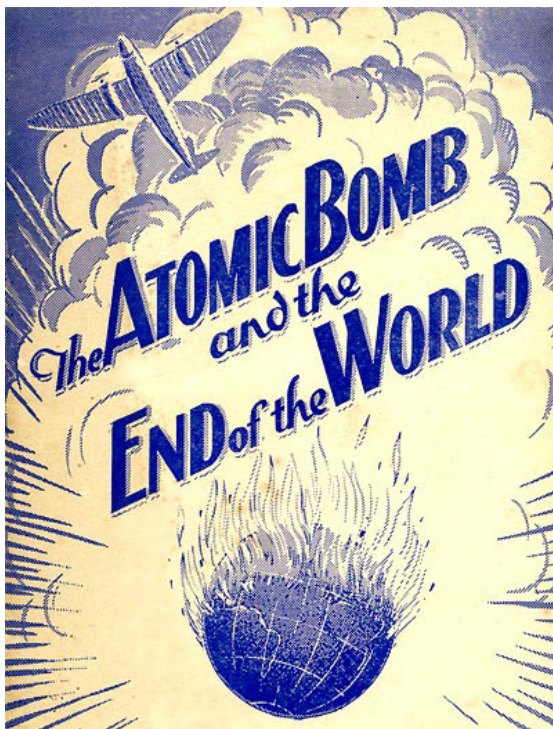
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